

# Lionel Stein's Shabbat Newsletter

## Shelach

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This newsletter is dedicated to the memories of

דוד בן אפרים יונה הכהן    איתא בת אריה לייב הכהן    שמעון בן שאול

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**Shabbat Shalom – Lionel Stein**  
**"Am Yisrael Chai"**

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### **Social and Personal**

#### **Mazal Tov to**

Steven Adler who is celebrating a milestone birthday

### **Editorial**

At this time, we have a lot that we need to be grateful for.

We can only but imagine what would have happened if these ballistic missiles had a nuclear war head. Iran would in all likelihood have got one or more of their proxies to have fired these missiles at Israel.

Israel, through its Ambassador to the United States has strongly suggested that there is an amazing surprise awaiting Iran, way beyond what happened with Hezbollah and the beepers. We wait with baited breath.

On Tuesday evening President Trump gave Israel strong encouragement regarding the imperative need to end Iran's nuclear ambitions. In bridge terminology, Israel has the "Trump" card.

Germany's Chancellor, Freidrich Merz, calls Iran fight 'the dirty work Israel is doing for all of us.' How true that statement is, if only other world leaders could see this war in the same light.

At this time our thoughts and prayers are with Israel and may Hashem guide Eretz Yisrael to victory that will bring peace to Israel, the Middle East and the rest of the world.

## Kodesh

RABBI AVRAHAM CHAIM TANZER TALKS

**SHELACH**

VOL 5/5785

**“DON’T MAKE THEM GOOD – MAKE THEM GREAT**

**שְׁלַח לְךָ אֲנָשִׁים**

*Send for yourself men (13, 2)*

*Rashi notes that Hashem was indicating to Moshe that the National intent to send out spies was not favourable. Thus, he said: ‘Lecha’ – at your discretion, send them; I, Hashem do not approve of this plan.*

*It appears that Moshe understood the hint, and therefore prayed for Yeshoshua that Hashem save him from the counsel of the spies. Nevertheless, Moshe sent them. Hashem too concurred.*

*We could perhaps have expected Moshe, the inimitable and historic national leader to put his foot down, call out the wicked designs of the spies and their supporters and quell the call for the spying mission. Yet he does not.*

*Perhaps there is an insight into national leadership here. As strong and commanding as a leader may be, and arguably, should be; nevertheless, the community are not his to fashion as an amount of clay. They are not his to order into line like recalcitrant children.*

*The leadership challenge is rather to develop the Nation into maturity, to bring out it’s positive kochos – strength. Sometimes, it means allowing them to learn the bitter taste of failure – on a terrible scale.*

*This is because his job isn’t to ‘knock them into shape’, but rather facilitate their growth and development into a mature multifaceted community. This can’t be achieved by stifling them- even for their own best interest. Stifling them will only breed a miniature community structure, a diminished one. Never a great one.*

*Even when dealing with people on an individual basis, he was not one to command the specific action, because that would ultimately belittle the person.*

*Yet, at times the leader must call out the insurrection by name. The great leader knows when to apply each model.*

\*

*Even as a parent, Rabbi Tanzer would happily advise, if asked; he was not one to decide for you, nor to protect you from learning yourself. He implied trust; trust that you can make a good call, and trust that you are greater than your errors, and will be able to pick yourself up, and move forward, learning the lesson your way.*

\*

*Rabbi Tanzer zt”l believed firmly that his job was never to instruct and fashion the community in his own image. He had too much respect for the community and ‘eimasa detzibura’ – reverence for them. Rather his job was to guide, to indicate the way forward. At times to quell a misplaced motion with firmness. Sometimes to smile, ever so gently, with compassion, wisdom and understanding to whisper: ‘They’ll learn’ – in their time.*

*He believed that as a Kahal – a community, we do learn ultimately, and will come out greater.*

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**BELIEVING IS SEEING**

**אֶרֶץ אֲכָלֶת יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ הוּא**

*“It’s a land that devours its inhabitants” (13, 32)*

*Chazal (Sotah 35a) teach that this refers to the fact that as the spies travelled through the land, they saw funeral procession everywhere they went. Seeing such an unusual number of funerals, they concluded that this must be a hard land; one that devours its inhabitants.*

*The Steipler Gaon in his Birkas Peretz uses this incident to illustrate a truism; one that Rabbi Tanzer often repeated – we see what we want to see, hear what we want to hear, and believe what we want to believe.*

*What you see and conclude is usually not such an objective evaluation after all; it’s usually a subjective view – based on what you believed.*

*They say seeing is believing; but the opposite is really the truth – ‘believing is seeing’, because you will only see what your heart has convinced you to see. People are far more subjective in their views and attitudes than they care to admit.*

*Our Sages tell us that the spies traversed the Land of Israel with a jaundiced eye. They had their own agenda. The Mesilas Yesharim explains that they were worried that when they came into Israel there would be a new order and they would lose their positions of prominence. Therefore, they went in with a negative approach to the whole idea of*

entering Eretz Yisroel. Truthfully, they probably were not even aware of these powerful subconscious emotions; but that is where their decisions stemmed from; not from objective analysis.

The *Steipler* comments that they should have realized that the funerals were an act of *Hashgacha*. They should have said: 'Hashem is protecting us! We are spies, and naturally anxious about being detected, so Hashem caused the people to be distracted by their own grief and the funerals so that they do not notice us! What Hashgacha!'

Similarly, Rabbi Tanzer concluded, optimistic people, of good faith, will always see the positive side of an event – they are programmed to see the half-full glass. Pessimists, on the other hand, are not responding to a negative situation; they simply are looking for negatives and therefore find it everywhere they look.

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### **GRASSHOPPERS IN THE FIELDS – A THOUGHT ON SELF IMAGE**

וְנָהִי בְעֵינֵינוּ כְּחַגְבִּים וְכִן הָיִינוּ בְּעֵינֵיהֶם

We were in our own eyes as grasshoppers, and so were we in their eyes (13, 33)

Rabbi Tanzer used to often repeat the idea of the Rav Menachem Mendel, the famous *Kotzker* Rebbe, who explained that the real sin of the ten spies, was not really that they returned with an alarming report; because that is, in fact, how they saw the situation. Rather, the real '*Chet*' lies in these words: 'and so we were in their eyes'. The *Kotzker* exclaimed that they should never have given a thought to how they appeared in the eyes of the locals. It should never have occurred to them how they are viewed by others.

Kotzk, the bastion of fearless truth and honesty, could not tolerate a self-image that is based upon what others think of you.

*"If I am I because I am I, and you are you because you are you, then I am I and you are you", but, he continued: "if I am I only because of you, and you are you because of me, then I am not I, neither are you, you." ~ Rav MM of Kotzk*

Rav Menachem Mendel of Kotzk famously said: "If I am I because I am I, and you are you because you are you, then I am I and you are you", but, he continued: "if I am I only because of you, and you are you because of me, then I am not I, neither are you, you."

One who is busy identifying him/herself based on the impression they are making on other becomes a mirror, in which exists a shifting, alternating illusion, changing even more than a chameleon, every time the mirror is in front of someone else. Such a person has no depth, has no integrity, and has no essence. Life is a picture.

Thus, Rav Menachem Mendel of Kotzk declared, the Spies should have been so focused on their mission, and their essence as People of Hashem, that their appearance in the eyes of the locals couldn't impact them.

Actually, we have no true and accurate way of knowing how we appear to others. Hashem could plant in their eyes to see the Spies as Angels of Heaven with frightful powers.

We see that when people base their identity on others, their lives are about comparisons, external and inappropriate comparisons, since you never know what is really going on in some else's life and heart. We then project our insecurities on others, and reflect back to them our feelings of inadequacy and detachment. These are hardly the seeds of success.

*"If you think you can succeed or if you think you can't succeed, you are probably right"*

As per the common quotation: 'If you think you can succeed or if you think you can't succeed, you are probably right'. Rabbi Tanzer used to expand that if you feel and think of yourself like a lowly grasshopper – you become one!

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### **IF YOU HAVE A FIRST-CLASS TICKET, ACT LIKE A FIRST-CLASS PASSENGER**

Rabbi Tanzer often told the story of Yankel, the ne'er-do-well from the Shtetl whose wealthy brother had kindly given him a train ticket to the big city, Warsaw. Not knowing where to go on the chaotic platform, he simply followed others who looked like his economic class, at the rear of the train.

During the trip, the conductor was heard demanding to see tickets. The nervous passenger saw others quickly hide under baggage and under the seats. He presumed that he too had better become invisible and quickly climbed under the chairs.

Unfortunately, the conductor spotted him and yanked him out into the open demanding to see the tickets. Yankel gingerly opened his hand to show the crumpled ticket he had held tightly onto.

The conductor said: Mister, you have a first-class ticket. You don't belong under the baggage. You need to go to the first-class carriage.

\*

*“If you don’t recognise your faults, that’s a big problem; if you don’t recognise your strengths, that’s an infinitely worse sin, because then you won’t ever develop; you’ll never do Teshuva.*

Rabbi Tanzer summed it up: If you have first class ticket, you need to act like a first-class passenger. Don’t settle for the third-class baggage compartment.

The Spies seem to have forgotten that they were holding first class tickets. The thought they were baggage-compartment people, and behaved that way.

Rabbi Tanzer constantly taught: We have first class tickets, from Hashem Himself. Act it!

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### **BE YOURSELF - REALLY**

Rabbi Tanzer used to quote Reb Yechezkel of Kuzmir, who offered a scintillating insight into an expression of Rashi: ‘Due to Klal Yisrael dearness to Hashem, He counts them at every hour (‘*bechol sha’a vesh’a*’). Reb Yechezkel explained this based on a Mishna in Avos which states (4, 3) *don’t be scornful of any man... because there is no man who doesn’t have his hour (to shine)*’. He explained that every person will rise to his own level of greatness for a moment. It is that moment that Hashem ‘counts him’, ie, determines his place. That is through Hashem’s love for Klal Yisrael, He defines us by our moments of spiritual triumph, not failure.

*“Define yourself, and others, by their high moment of success, not by their lows”*

We too, need to note our own moment of personal triumph, of spiritual heroism; and then we need to base our self-image and definition on our successes.

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### **A GRACIOUS GUEST DOESN’T POINT OUT NEGATIVES IN THE PALACE**

**טובה הארץ מאד מאד**

*The Land is very, very good (14, 7)*

Rabbi Tanzer was of the belief that it’s not appropriate to comment negatively about the Land of Israel and all, not even to complain about politics. The Pasuk ‘*Ur’eh betuv Yerushalayim*’ resonated deeply with him – See only the good of *Yerushalayim*, never the negatives.

*‘Urei betuv Yerushalayim – Note only the positives of Yerushalayim! ~ Rav YC Zonnenfeld*

He had an additional angle to his positive vision of Israel: To many people, who were not exposed to a true Torah education, Israel is their key identity and relationship with Torah and Yiddishkeit. Therefore, to purvey any cynicism regarding Israel could only be counterproductive.

He used to quote Rabbi Moshe of Lelov, who noted that the above Pasuk doubles the word ‘very, very’ good. He noted that the Mishna in Avos (4, 4) uses a similar expression regarding the trait of Humility: ‘Be very, very humble’. Rabbi Moshe of Lelov explained the similarity: Only if you are exceedingly humble will you be able to see that in fact, the land is exceedingly good. He continued to explain that if you see the negatives of Israel, you are simply showing that you need to work on humility.

When a person realizes that Eretz Yisrael is the King’s palace, designed and nurtured by the King, how can he possibly go around finding fault?! This is the way the King designed it! Much of life is also that way. Hashem created situations through which we can grow. He brings people and interactions into our lives through which we can develop our character. To go around malingering and gossiping and fault-finding, is an arrogance and a lack of vision that the King has arranged it thus.

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*“Humility, Rabbi Tanzer explained, was never about thinking that: ‘I wish to be the humblest person in the world’ – that’s arrogance! You’re thinking about yourself! True humility, he quoted Rav Hirsch, is about focusing on the Will of Hashem. You only acquire humility ‘behesech hada’as’ – when you are focused on the things that need to be done – oblivious to the way you appear.*

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The Spies are criticized by our Sages for not learning the lesson of Miriam. They merited the immense *zechus* of travelling the Land of Israel, but they were not mindful of the reality of being a guest in the King’s Palace. The reason they forgot, is because they were thinking too much about themselves, and their high station in the Jewish Nation, therefore they forgot that we are living out our lives in the palace, before the Throne, in the direct presence of the King of Kings. Let’s not complain or make snide remarks about the Palace...

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### **QUOTES TO PONDER**

*Rabbi Tanzer used to say... On leadership and self-leadership*

**“Be firm, but show the kids your nice side (advice to a teacher).**

Children need structure; but above all they need to relate to you. They do need to feel a sense of belonging and relationship; that’s how Torah is transmitted.

\*

**“Before you speak, think what does the audience want to hear.**

Try to always engage them with their interest first.

When you speak to people, you need to say something that will resonate with them. It’s not just thinking out loud.

**“Discipline is important in the classroom; without it teaching is very difficult. Relating to the Talmidim, however, is even more critical – it’s the essence.**

\*

**“Reach out to people when others have already moved on.**

But be sensitive; if they no longer need your support, they’ll tell you in subtle ways.

\*

**“If you’re expecting *kavod*, you’ll often get hurt. Intend to *give* honour at each turn, and you can only be pleasantly surprised if they honour you.**

Always try share the limelight. Reflect it on to others.

### **Rabbi Label Lam on this week’s Parsha “torah.org”**

#### **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 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 earthy 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.**

### **Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky on this week's Parsha "torah.org"**

#### **A Matter of Perspective**

This week we read about the twelve spies who were sent to scout out the Land of Canaan. Their mission of surveillance was meant to prepare the Jewish nation so that the entry into their promised homeland be smooth and virtually without surprises. Total trust in Hashem's Divine design should have warranted no mortal meddling, but mortal prudence or perhaps apprehension and skepticism prompted their desire to manage the situation in their own way. And, as has been the case with the relationship between Jews and their land from time immemorial, the results were disastrous. All the spies, save the righteous Calev and Yehoshua, brought back tales of woe, predictions of destruction, and assurances of defeat. The Jews were quickly and simply swayed, and the buoyant expectancy of a gallant entry into the land promised to our forefathers, quickly turned into a night of bemoaning anticipated enduring misfortunes. That night, the 9th day of the fifth month, became engraved in the annals of our history as a night of weeping. What began as unwarranted wailing turned into a forever fateful night the 9th of Av. From the saga of the spies to the destruction of two Temples, to the signing of inquisition, to the outbreak of World War I, the war to end all wars, the 9th of Av is a hallmark of Jewish misfortunes. But if we analyze the complaints of the meraglim (spies), we find an emerging pattern of skewed vision. They saw fruit so big and beautiful that it had to be carried on a double pole. Yet they viewed it as an indication of giant produce, indicative of the degree of food matter that nourished their powerful and physically giant adversaries.

But not only the living species gave them conniptions. They brought forth to the Children of Israel an evil report on the Land that they had spied out, saying, "The Land through which we have passed, to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants! All the people that we saw in it were huge! (Numbers 13:32).

Rashi explains the meaning of "a land that devours its inhabitants." The meraglim complained, "In every place which we passed we found the inhabitants burying their dead" They missed the point. In fact, Hashem caused many deaths amongst them at that time, and so the Canaanites were engaged in burying their dead. This proved beneficial for the spies, because the giants were occupied with their mourning and paid no attention to the spies.

How can an event that was providentially meant to be so beneficial, be misconstrued as an omen of misfortune?

Back in the early 1950's a large shoe consortium with stores across the United States and Canada, decided to take their business venture into the emerging continent of Africa. They sent two of their salesman to explore the prospects of business in the remote villages across the Dark Continent. After just one week, they received a cable from the first salesman: "I am returning at once. No hope for business. Nobody here wears shoes!" They did not hear from the second salesman for four weeks. Then one day an urgent cable arrived. "Send 15,000 pairs of shoes at once! I have leased space in five locations. Will open chain of stores. This place is filled with opportunity. Nobody has shoes!"

The Steipler Gaon, Rabbi Yisrael Yaakov Kanievsky, in his classic work on chumash, Birchas Peretz explains that poor attitudes help forge opinions that are diametric to the truth. The Talmud tells us that, "Man is led in the path that he chooses to travel!"

Imagine. The spies see these giants wailing and weeping at massive funerals day after day. They should have figured that this plague was an anomaly, for if this was the norm, then the funerals would have become part of their everyday existence, and hardly an event worthy of disrupting their normally tight security.

In fact, comments the Steipler, that in the times of Yehoshua, the two spies who entered Canaan were immediately detected on the very day they arrived, and they were hunted with a vengeance! Yet these twelve spies remained unnoticed. But the spies did not look at the events with that view. When people have sour opinions and want to see only doom and gloom, then even a ray of light will blind them. When one is constantly weighed down with worry, he will only drag his feet down the path of discontent. However, if we take life's bumpy road, as a chance to exercise our endurance, and turn the lemons handed to us into lemonade, then unlike

the meraglim we will glean light from even the seemingly darkest abyss. And one day we will follow the path of that light to the Promised Land.

### **The Parsha Quiz by Rabbi Jonathan Fox**

**Questions and answers are based on the simple translation of the Chumash.**

#### **SHELACH**

- Q. From which tribe/s did Moses not send out a man to spy out the Land of Canaan?  
A. The tribe of Levi [13:4-15]
- Q. Whose name did Moses change and to what did he change it?  
A. Hoshea to Joshua [13:16]
- Q. Who were the three children of the giant that the spies encountered in Chevron?  
A. Achiman, Sheshai and Talmai [13:22]
- Q. List the types of fruits that the spies took from the Valley of Eshcol.  
A. Grapes, pomegranates and figs [13:23]
- Q. According to the report-back of the spies: (a) Who was dwelling in the south? (b) Were the cities greatly fortified?  
A. (a) Amalek [13:29] (b) Yes [13:28]
- Q. Which of the spies said: "We shall surely ascend and conquer it"?  
A. Caleb [13:30]
- Q. Fill in the missing word: "We cannot ascend to that people for it is too \_\_\_\_\_ for us!"?  
A. strong [13:31]
- Q. Fill in the missing word: "we were like \_\_\_\_\_ in our eyes, and so we were in their eyes."  
A. grasshoppers [13:33]
- Q. Who said to whom: "If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this Wilderness!"  
A. The entire assembly to Moses and Aaron [14:2]
- Q. Which of the twelve spies tore their garments?  
A. Joshua and Caleb [14:6]
- Q. Who described the Land as "very very good"?  
A. Joshua and Caleb [14:7]
- Q. Hashem announced to Moses that he would annihilate the people (a) What did Hashem promise to do with Moses? (b) Was Moses successful in his appeal to Hashem not to annihilate the people?  
A. (a) To make him a greater and more powerful nation than they [14:12] (b) Yes [14:20]
- Q. Which of the following did Moses use to describe God: Slow to Anger; Teacher of Torah; Abundant in Kindness; Quick to Respond?  
A. Slow to Anger and Abundant in Kindness [14:18]
- Q. Who said to whom: "I have forgiven because of your words."?  
A. Hashem to Moses [14:20]
- Q. How many times had the people tested Hashem?  
A. Ten [14:22]
- Q. For how many years would the Children of Israel have to roam in the Wilderness to bear their guilt for having provoked Hashem?  
A. Forty years [14:33]
- Q. How did the spies, who spread a report against the Land, die?  
A. They died in a plague [14:37]
- Q. After Hashem decreed the punishment for the sin of the spies, the people decided to ascend 'to the place of which Hashem had spoken'. (a) Did Moses consent to their decision? (b) Did they attempt to make the ascent?  
A. (a) No [14:41] (b) Yes [14:44]
- Q. What measure of wine was to be brought as a libation with (a) a sheep offering (b) a ram offering (c) a bull offering?  
A. (a) A quarter of a hin [15:5] (b) A third of a hin [15:7] (c) A half of a hin [15:10]
- Q. Fill in the missing words: 'From the first of your kneading shall you give a \_\_\_\_\_, for your generations.'  
A. portion to Hashem [15:21]
- Q. For an unintentional error of the assembly: (a) What animal must be brought as an elevation-offering? (b) What animal must be brought as a sin-offering? (c) Must the elevation-offering be accompanied by a meal-offering? (d) Must the sin-offering be accompanied by a libation?  
A. (a) A young bull [15:24] (b) A he-goat [15:24] (c) Yes [15:24] (d) No [15:24]
- Q. For an unintentional sin of an individual, what animal is brought as a sin-offering?  
A. A she-goat (within its first year) [15:27]
- Q. If a proselyte blasphemed Hashem, what is his punishment?

A. He shall be cut off from among his people [15:30]

Q. Regarding the man who was found collecting wood on the Sabbath day: (a) Why was he initially placed in custody? (b) What punishment did Moses pronounce for the man?

A. (a) Because it had not been clarified what should be done with him [15:34] (b) Death by stoning [15:35]

Q. What colour thread of wool is to be placed on the tzitzis of each corner of a garment?

A. Torquoise [15:38]

Q. Fill in the missing words: 'It shall be tzitzis for you, that you may see it and remember all the \_\_\_\_\_ of Hashem and perform them; and not explore after your \_\_\_\_\_ and after your \_\_\_\_\_ after which you stray.'

A. commandments; heart; eyes [15:39]

### **Shabbat Shalom Fax by Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig**

Everyone is familiar with the braided breads of Shabbat known as "*challah*." In fact, "*challah* bread" has become well-known in much of the world and is typically available in mainstream bakeries. It is even featured as an ingredient in many common recipes (French toast, bread pudding, stuffing, etc.).

**While** we find the term *challot* (plural of *challah*) referring to both leavened and unleavened bread in numerous places in the Torah, it is not in connection to the loaves that are today part and parcel of every Shabbat meal.

**One** of the earliest mentions of having "*challah*" on Shabbat is by the great medieval sage Rabbi Yisroel Isserlein (1390-1460), the author of the important work on Jewish law known as the *Terumat Hadeshen*. In his book *Leket Yosher* he says that it is proper to usher in the Shabbat with "*challot*" set on the table.

**Many** may be surprised to learn that there is actually a *mitzvah* in the Torah known as "*hafrashat challah* – the separation of *challah*," which has absolutely nothing to do with Shabbat. Briefly, in ancient Israel, any time a large bread dough was prepared using around 60 oz. or more of grain flour (around eight cups), a small piece of the dough was separated and given to the *Cohanim* – the priestly caste of Jews who served in the Temple.

**Today**, we still separate a piece of dough from large batches of bread to burn before we eat the bread made from that batch. A special blessing is made at the time we separate this small piece of dough. As we shall soon see, the *mitzvah* of separating the dough is about prioritizing the spiritual components in our lives, even in the most mundane activities like making bread. Again, this has nothing to do with Shabbat, this *mitzvah* applies to all doughs prepared.

**The *mitzvah*** of separating *challah* applies to every Jew, man or woman. However, traditionally, this special *mitzvah* is designated to Jewish women. In her role of setting the tone of the Jewish home, the woman is entrusted with *mitzvot* (plural) such as this and lighting the Shabbat candles. These activities nourish her family physically and spiritually.

**Of course**, this reminds me of one of my seven-year-old grandson's favorites jokes: "What kind of martial arts does a *challah* practice? Jew-dough." My apologies, sometimes it is hard to forget certain inanities – and now you are stuck with it as well. You're welcome.

**The *mitzvah*** of separating *challah* is found in this week's Torah portion.

*"When you enter the land where I bring you, it shall be that when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall set aside a portion for God. From the first of your dough, you shall give to God an offering throughout your generations" (Numbers 15:18-22).*

**In order** to fully understand the *mitzvah* of *hafrashat challah* it is important to view it in the context of this week's Torah portion, which recounts the tragic episode of the twelve spies sent by Moses and the Jewish people to reconnoiter the Land of Israel and to produce a report on the land and its inhabitants. The sages point out that ten of the twelve spies conspired as a group to slander the Land of Israel. According to some opinions, they were motivated to do so by the fear that they would lose their positions of leadership when the nation entered the Land of Israel.

**Many** of the facts were woven together to create a narrative that entering the Land of Israel was a suicide mission. The Jewish people reacted with horror and desperation and started wailing loudly – and quite astonishingly – that they were better off appointing a new leader and returning to Egypt!

**Unsurprisingly**, God was very displeased and decreed that the entirety of the nation would wander in the desert for forty years (one year for every day that the spies spent in the land) until the entire generation died out. This happened on the 9th of Av, and according to tradition God declared, "You cried on this night for no reason. I will give you a reason to cry forevermore on this day."



**The 9th of Av** is now the anniversary of some of the most horrible things that have happened in Jewish history including the destruction of BOTH Temples. Countless other tragic events also occurred on that day, such as on the 9th of Av in 1492 when all the Jews of Spain were designated to leave the country. There are many other aspects to the 9th of Av, and we will discuss them further in a few weeks, as the date draws nearer.

**The story** of the twelve spies is well-known, but there is an oft overlooked postscript to this calamitous story – the incident of the “*Mapilim* – Defiant Ones.”

**In brief**, the morning after the terrible decree that the generation would perish and not enter the land, a large group decided that they would show the Almighty that they **did** desire to enter the land. Thus, they began ascending the mountain and told Moses, “*We are ready, we shall go up to the place of which God has spoken – we have sinned*” (Numbers 14:40).

**Upon hearing** their plans, Moses warned them explicitly, “*Do not ascend, it will not succeed. Do not ascend, for God is not in your midst [...] You have turned away from God and He will not be with you*” (Numbers 14:41-43). So, the people listened to Moses, abandoned their plans and went back to their tents to spend some time reflecting on their misdeeds, right? Of course not. They defiantly attempted to enter the Land of Israel and were utterly wiped out by the Amalekite and Canaanite nations who dwelled in the surrounding mountains.

**Almost immediately** after these two stories, the Torah introduces the *mitzvah* of separating the dough. This is strange as this *mitzvah* only came into effect once the Jews entered the Land of Israel and God had just decreed that they would wander in the desert for the next forty years. So why would they even need to know about this *mitzvah* yet?

**Additionally**, according to the Talmud (*Kiddushin* 40b), “Torah is greater than *challah*, for the Torah was given forty years before *challah*.” (This refers to the fact that the *mitzvah* of *challah* came into effect only after they entered the Land of Israel, whereas the Torah was given to them right after they left Egypt.)

**But** the statement itself is incredibly difficult to understand: What is the basis for making any comparison between the Torah and the *mitzvah* of *challah*? Why should it be necessary for the sages to identify Torah as being the greater of the two? It hardly seems logical to place them on the same spectrum!

**There is** another teaching from the sages that says that one of the purposes of creation was so that the Jews could fulfill the *mitzvah* of *challah* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:4). This is quite perplexing. Why is this *mitzvah*, more than any other precepts in the Torah, considered important enough to justify the very creation of the world?

**The answer** begins with understanding why this *mitzvah* takes place at the time of kneading the dough; why aren't we simply required to give a small loaf of bread to the *Cohanim*?

**Bread** is a staple of life – historically, the very definition and essence of human sustenance and survival. When a person cannot provide for himself there is a deep sense of shame. According to Jewish philosophy, the reason we have free will is so that we can earn reward and justify our existence by choosing to do good over evil. Of course, the Almighty could have simply given us the reward, but that would be charity, which is known as “*nehama dikesufa* – bread of shame.” Thus, the very purpose of creation is to empower man to provide for himself and build his dignity by not feeling like a charity case.

**The fourth chapter** of the famous compendium of Jewish wisdom known as “*Pirkei Avot* – *Ethics of Our Fathers*” opens with “Who is wealthy? He who is happy with his lot.” This is generally misunderstood as merely being happy with what you have. Which happens to be true. But to really understand the depth of this concept one needs to examine the verse that the sages learn this axiom from: “*the labor of your hands is what you consume*” (*Psalms* 128:2).

**The sages** are teaching us that ultimate satisfaction with what you have is only achieved when you have the ability to provide for yourself. If the *mitzvah* were to take *challah* after the bread was made, it could be understood as merely a means of giving thanks to the Almighty for providing us with bread. Instead, since the *mitzvah* is to take *challah* from dough, it is actually a way to thank God for giving us the **ability to make** bread. We are prioritizing the holy aspects of our lives by giving the first piece of dough to the *Cohanim* who are serving in the Holy Temple.

**The real** failure of the Jewish people in the story of the twelve spies was their desire to take the land by themselves. Of course, they had seen all of God's miracles in Egypt – they were very well aware that God could easily defeat all the inhabitants of the Land of Israel. But they sent the spies, not because they didn't trust God, but because they wanted to conquer it themselves and make it their own land.

**They did** not fully appreciate that Israel was holy, belonging to God, and that the Almighty was inviting them to live in His land. They didn't appreciate the holiness of the land. As the sages teach us, once in the land they didn't observe the laws of *shemittah* – leaving the land fallow every seven years – which ultimately led to them being cast out of Israel at the time of the destruction of the first Holy Temple.

**They are** given the *mitzvah* of *challah* after the incident of the spies to emphasize that even when we provide for ourselves it has to be within the context of ever striving to be connected to holiness. Even today, when we are blessed to have the country of Israel, we should never forget that our real right to the land comes not merely because we reconquered our ancestral home but due to our connection to God through His land.

### **Shlach, Numbers 13:1 – 15:41**

**The Jewish** people received the Torah on Mt. Sinai and were ready to enter the Land of Israel. There was a consensus of opinion amongst the people that we should send spies to see if it was feasible to conquer the land. Moses knew that the Almighty's promise to give the land included a guarantee to conquer it. However, one of the principles of life, which we learn from this portion, is: the Almighty allows each of us the free will to go in the direction we choose. Even though one man and the Almighty is a majority, Moses – by Divine decree – sent out the princes of the tribes (men of the highest caliber) to spy out the land.

**Twelve spies** were sent. Ten came back with a report of strong fortifications and giants; they rallied the people against going up to the land. Joshua ben Nun and Calev ben Yefunah (Moses' brother-in-law) tried to stem the rebellion, but did not succeed. The Almighty decreed 40 years of wandering in the desert, one year for each day they spied in the land of Israel. This happened on the 9th of Av, a date noted throughout Jewish history for tragedy.

### **Summary of the weekly Torah Reading by Rabbi Aron Tendler "torah.org"**

**1st Aliya:** Moshe sends the Spies on their mission.

**2nd Aliya:** The Spies return carrying the massive fruits of the land. They deliver their negative report and the nation loses its faith in G-d and Moshe.

**3rd Aliya:** Moshe successfully argues for the life of the nation, and Hashem issues the 40 year decree of wandering and dying.

**4th Aliya:** The Spies die, and the nation is informed of their own punishment.

**5th Aliya:** The laws of the Mincha - meal offering are stated.

**6th Aliya:** The laws of separating Challah - the dough offering, and the communal sin offering are stated.

**7th Aliya:** The individual sin offering; the incident with the man who transgressed Shabbos by gathering sticks; his punishment; and the Mitzvah of Tzitzit, conclude the Parsha.

### **Haftorah: Shlach Yehoshua 2:1**

This week's Haftorah relates the story of Yehoshua sending Kalev and Pinchas to spy out Yericho, their encounter with Rachav, and their report confirming the fear of Yericho's inhabitants. The connection to our Parsha is obvious, however the outcome of this "second mission" was far different than the first one 38 years earlier. The year was 2488 -1273 b.c.

### **1 Minute on the Parasha with Rav Adin Steinsaltz z"l**

#### **Parashat Shelach**

#### **The Land that Consumes: Matter and Spirit**

The central question of Parashat Shelach concerns how the spies—described by the Torah as worthy leaders chosen at God's bidding—could refuse to enter the Promised Land. Our sages tell us these men spoke truth, yet were "uprooted from the world" for their words. The key lies in understanding their claim that the land "consumes its inhabitants." Life in the wilderness was like belonging to a kollel—manna fell daily, basic needs were provided, and one could dedicate oneself entirely to Torah study. The spies foresaw that entering the Land meant assuming the burdens of agriculture, commerce, and all the practical demands of normal existence, where spiritual pursuits would compete with the relentless requirements of working the soil and maintaining a society.

This argument between the spies and those who supported entering the Land reflects a fundamental dispute about the relationship between the material and spiritual worlds. The spies advocated for remaining in the pure spiritual realm of the wilderness, free from worldly contamination. Moses, however, championed a different

Moses understood that entering the Land carried real dangers—that people could indeed be consumed by materialistic concerns, as occurred during the period of the Judges. Yet he insisted this path represented the ultimate divine purpose. Like Einstein's formula revealing that matter contains concentrated energy, the material world holds greater potential for powerful spirituality than pure spirit itself. The challenge is not to avoid the material but to sanctify it, to live fully in the world while maintaining awareness of the transcendent. This remains the perpetual Jewish struggle: how to be wholly present in the demands of practical existence while preserving and expressing our deepest spiritual identity.

### **A Nation Rising and Roaring Like a Lion by Rabbi Efrem Goldberg Senior Rabbi Boca Raton Synagogue**

Several times over the last few days, I was talking to someone in Israel—my daughter, sister or a friend—and they nonchalantly interrupted to say, “I need to hang up, the sirens is sounding and we need to head to the bomb shelter.” To be clear, though this is commonplace, there is absolutely nothing normal about ever having to utter the sentence, “I am gathering my family and going to a bomb shelter because ballistic missiles are headed our way.”

Is it really any wonder that Jews suffer disproportionately from gastrointestinal disease? How could the stress, anxiety, and trauma of two thousand years of running and hiding from pogroms, attempted exterminations, and expulsions not be absorbed into our people's kishkes?

Eighty years after the Holocaust, Jews are once again running to take shelter from those attacking them. In Gaza and Lebanon, our heroic soldiers have been on the front lines risking their lives for the future of our people. But in this war with Iran, all of Israel, 10 million people, find themselves on the front lines, running for shelter and bracing for potential impact. This includes waking sleeping babies, carefully escorting the elderly, stocking up space, packing people in, and going long periods without sleep.

### **Mi K'amcha Yisroel – Nobody Like the Jewish People**

I am in absolute awe of my family, friends and all in Israel whose lives have stopped and have been turned upside down. Many are doing it with spouses serving in miluim or stuck out of the country or without family around to help them. The entire country is now bearing the brunt of the hatred of Iran who want to wipe out the whole Jewish nation globally but are taking it all out only on those in Israel. And yet, somehow, our people carry on with positivity, faith, hope, tenacity, resolve, and a healthy sense of humor.

This is the story of our people. They, our brothers and sisters in Israel, are why we are unstoppable and undefeatable.

There is much uncertainty that remains, but as of now we know that Israel has pulled off an operation that makes the Hezbollah beeper episode look modest and, according to some experts, is on par with the miracle of the Six Day War. On June 13, 6/13, an auspicious date, Israel launched a pre-emptive strike to take out Iran's nuclear capability, a country that has pledged to destroy Israel and wipe out the Jewish people. Earlier that same day, the Prime Minister davened at the Kotel, a seemingly innocuous gesture as he hosted a foreign leader. Together with the announcement he was going on vacation and attending a celebration, and the coordinated statements by President Trump, Secretary Rubio, and Steve Witkoff telling Israel not to attack, Iran was caught by surprise.

Mindbogglingly, the Mossad had been operating in Iran for years, setting up a base with drones that were smuggled in. Having eliminated the air defense, Israel's extraordinary air force operated with impunity, flying more than 1,100 miles to relentlessly pound missile sites, attack nuclear sites and, in pinpoint strikes, eliminate Iranian nuclear scientists and military leaders all while brazenly refueling over Iran.

Israel orchestrated events that they knew would cause Iranian military leadership to gather and then took them out. Israel is the size of New Jersey and has 10 million people. Iran is more than twice the size of Texas and has 93 million people. We are witnessing nothing less than a modern-day version of David defeating Goliath.

This courageous action, in defiance of some world opinion and world leaders, is a gift to the world, just like it was when Israel took out Iraq and Syria's nuclear programs. Thankfully, despite the public posture designed to distract, in truth, President Trump and the United States stand with Israel, are coordinating with Israel and are helping defend Israel.

### **Gratitude and Angst**

On Thursday night, when Israel launched its preemptive strike, we were filled with gratitude and elation, pride and joy in the unprecedented and heroic success. But those feelings were quickly tempered as Iran began to

retaliate and launch waves of barrages of ballistic missiles, most of which have been intercepted but too many of which have gone through, taken lives, and caused scores of injuries.

There have been countless, extraordinary miracles and achievements. As this war with Iran continues to unfold, we are filled simultaneously with boundless gratitude and pride on the one hand but also profound concern, worry, and angst on the other. How do we balance these conflicting feelings?

Once, in the early years of his leadership, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi told his chassidim: “One must live with the times.” What he meant is that every day a Jew should “live with” and interpret everything happening through the messages and prism of Torah. The timing with which we read the weekly Parsha is not random but by design from Above and there is always a connection.

It is no coincidence that Israel courageously attacked Iran in the week the Torah portion tells us: “When you are at war in your land against an aggressor who attacks you, you shall sound short blasts on the trumpets, that you may be remembered before your God and be delivered from your enemies.”

This is the same Parsha that contains the promise: “*Va'yehi binsoa ha'Aron...v'yafutzu oyvecha, v'yanusu misanecha mipanecha*. When the Ark was to set out, Moshe would say: Advance, Hashem! May Your enemies be scattered, And may Your foes flee before You!”

Rashi explains: “Your enemies,” a phrase we address to Hashem, means that anyone who hates the Jewish people hates the Creator of the universe. Iran has targeted the Jewish people and in so doing has targeted our Father in Heaven. Iran has started up with the wrong enemy.

When the Aron sets out, when the Torah leads us, when we are proud Jews, God makes a promise that He will help us defeat our enemies. When the Prime Minister, the political leader of the Jewish state, the Commander in Chief of the Israeli military, goes to the Kotel to pray before launching an attack, the Ark is leading, our fighting is informed and inspired by our faith.

When the government chose a name for the operation, they didn't use a military code word or a reference to a weapon, they quoted a pasuk from our sacred Torah – *Hein am k'lavi yakum*, we are a nation that rises like a lion. That is leading with the Aron, fighting for our people and our Torah.

### **With Faith and Fortitude**

The Gemara (*Berachos* 12b) relates that at one time our rabbis contemplated adding the parsha of Balak, which includes the words of the wicked Bilam, into the seder to be said together with Shema. Why would we think it appropriate to quote daily a villainous prophet who hated our people, and why would we couple it with the iconic and central words of the Shema?

The Gemara itself tells us that what makes the words of Bilam so special are that they contain a pasuk comparing the Jewish people to a fearsome lion: “The Jewish people crouches; he lies like a lion and a lioness. Who dares rouse him?”

Rav Kook in *Ein Aya* explains that Bilam poetically compared the Jewish people first to a lion that rises and then to a sleeping lion that none dare disturb. Everyone who sees it rise and roar then fears the formidable powers of this majestic creature, even when it sleeps. Our people have survived against all odds, defying all the laws of history. We rise and rest like a lion so that we can continue to declare Shema. When we accept the yoke of Heaven, when we declare the unity of Hashem, we are indestructible.

In a world of variables, there are two constants. In a world that is temporary, there are two things permanent: Hashem as expressed through Shema, and the Jewish people, the lion who roars and rises when awake and who remains and is even feared when asleep.

We feel boundless gratitude to Israel's heroic soldiers and the members of Israel's air force. We recognize the selfless dedication of the Mossad agents who have lived for years in Iran undercover, forfeiting their Jewish identity and Jewish practice to protect the Jewish people. We appreciate the courageous leadership of Prime Minister Netanyahu. They all deserve credit, praise, admiration, and gratitude. Yes, they have dismantled Hezbollah, Hamas and pulled off amazing feats against Iran. But none of them could or would succeed without Hashem leading the way. We must never forget or fail to credit God with our survival, our existence and our future.

And that is why we can simultaneously be grateful to God and His agents for the success so far and also manage our concern and worry for the future. When we recognize and realize that God got us here, He enabled and

empowered our success and He promises us that we will be here forever, that we will persevere and triumph, that He is fighting by our side.

Our people have not only survived but thrived against all odds, against the laws of history, despite countless attempts to annihilate and exterminate us. We have persevered with faith and fortitude, resilience and resolve. When our enemies try to destroy us, we are protected by Hashem.

To our lions in Israel, not only the courageous members of the military but each and every one of the 10 million living on the front line - we are giving you the biggest hug, sending the greatest love, and thanking you from the bottom of our hearts.

### **Rabbi Shlomo Katz on this week's Parsha "torah.org"**

#### **We Will Do or We Will Spy**

In this week's Parashah, we read about the sending of the Spies, their evil report about Eretz Yisrael, and Hashem's decree that Bnei Yisrael would wander in the desert for 40 years—one year for each day of the Spies' mission. R' Yitzchak Aryeh Wormser z"l (1768-1847; Germany; known as the "Ba'al Shem of Michelstadt") notes that commentaries identify different possibilities for what Bnei Yisrael's sin was, each of which implies a different understanding of our obligations of Emunah / faith and Bitachon / trust in Hashem.

R' Levi ben Gershon z"l ("Ralbag"; 1288–1344) writes: One of the lessons this incident teaches is that one should place his trust in Hashem, especially when Hashem has already made known that His plans are exactly the same as what the person wants. Look at the bad that befell Bnei Yisrael when, despite the wonders of Hashem that they had already witnessed, they nevertheless sent spies rather than relying on Hashem's promise that they would inherit the Land! [Until here from Ralbag]

According to Ralbag's understanding of Bnei Yisrael's sin, writes the Ba'al Shem, it is improper for a person to expend any effort of his own to implement an express promise by Hashem. However, notes the Ba'al Shem, others understand that sending the Spies was not inherently sinful. They apparently hold that even when Hashem makes a promise, He nevertheless expects us to do our share to implement it. According to this view, Hashem's promise means only that, after we have done whatever we can, He will fill in what we are unable to do.

The Ba'al Shem continues: If sending spies was justified, what then was their sin? He answers: The Spies were afraid that Bnei Yisrael would sin before entering Eretz Yisrael or during its conquest and, therefore, would not merit the fulfillment of Hashem's promise. This was wrong, because Hashem had made an express promise to them.

But, asks the Ba'al Shem, didn't Hashem promise Yaakov that He would protect him, yet Yaakov was afraid of Esav because, perhaps, he (Yaakov) had sinned (see Bereishit 32:8)? He answers: Perhaps Yaakov was not subject to the same high expectations as Bnei Yisrael because they were protected by the merit of the multitude, while he was not. Or, perhaps the difference is that Bnei Yisrael had already experienced Hashem's wonders, while Yaakov had not.

The Ba'al Shem concludes: The most correct explanation of Bnei Yisrael's sin, however, is that they accepted the Lashon Ha'ra / evil tidings of the Spies about Eretz Yisrael—in particular, the Spies' assessment that they would be unable to conquer the Land. Perhaps man's intellect could not perceive how they would conquer such a land. Nevertheless, the Gemara (Shabbat 88a) relates that when Bnei Yisrael said, "Na'aseh ve'nishma" / "We will do and we will hear," a Bat Kol / Heavenly Voice proclaimed, "Who revealed this secret to My children?" [Until here from the Gemara.] To what "secret" was the Heavenly Voice referring? The Ba'al Shem explains: It refers to the secret that a human being is capable of accomplishing that which his intellect tells him is impossible. Just as, at the time of the Giving of the Torah, Bnei Yisrael accomplished the logically impossible feat of accepting a Torah they had not yet learned, so they should have believed that they could conquer Eretz Yisrael even if their intellects told them it was impossible. (*Ba'al Shem Mi'Michelstadt* p.256)

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#### ***"So they said to one another, 'Let us appoint a leader and let us return to Egypt!'" (14:4)***

R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chessed neighborhood and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) writes: Every redemption of the Jewish People consists of two parts—the spiritual and the physical. Thus we say in the blessing at the end of the Maggid section of the Pesach Haggadah, "For our redemption and for the liberation of our souls."

R' Charlap elaborates: The soul or spirit, being supernatural, can be redeemed instantly, without the need for any process or progression. The body, however, is of this world and can only be redeemed step-by-step, as any natural process would develop. When we read (Devarim 16:3), "With Chipazon / haste you departed from the land of Egypt," we refer to the emancipation of Bnei Yisrael's spirits from slavery in Egypt. However, their

bodies retained the memory and attitudes of slavery, which explains why, so many times during their journey through the desert, they suggested turning back to Egypt.

Similarly, writes R' Charlap, we read of the future redemption (Malachi 3:1), "Suddenly, the Master whom you seek will come to His sanctuary." The future spiritual redemption will occur suddenly; sons will return to their Father in Heaven in a wondrous Teshuvah movement full of complete love for Hashem. Even those most distant from Hashem and His Torah will crown Him as their king. The physical redemption, however, will be a slower, less dramatic, step-by-step process. (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Mei Marom* p.54)

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***"When you come to the Land to which I bring you: It shall be that when you will eat of the bread of the Land, you shall set aside a portion for Hashem. The first of your kneading, you shall set aside (literally, 'elevate') 'Challah' as a portion . . ." (15:18-20)***

R' Moshe Wolfson z"l (1925-2024; Mashgiach Ruchani of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn; he passed away this week) writes: The idea of setting aside the first of the kneading as a portion for Hashem alludes to the preciousness of the period of youth. One must take great care to protect one's youth, to elevate it, for during the period of youth one establishes the foundation for his entire life.

As a nation, we also experienced youth, i.e., the period following the Exodus, about which we read (Yirmiyahu 2:2), "So said Hashem, 'I remember for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days, your following after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown'." Because it was our youth, everything Bnei Yisrael did in the desert had a profound impact on our future, R' Wolfson writes. (*Emunat Itecha* 5757)

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***"Bnei Yisrael were in the wilderness, and they found a man gathering wood on the Shabbat day." (15:32)***

R' Moshe David Valle z"l (Italy; 1697-1777) asks: Why does the Torah say, "They found a man," instead of, "There was a man"?

He answers: The Torah is conveying that it was a wonder and a novelty to Bnei Yisrael that a person could be found to be transgressing Shabbat. After all, Bnei Yisrael had been very careful to observe Shabbat ever since they first received the Mahn (even before the Torah was given). It was particularly a shock to find someone transgressing Shabbat in public.

How, then, did this happen? R' Valle explains: Because "Bnei Yisrael were in the wilderness (desert)"—a place where, say Kabbalists, the Yetzer Ha'ra has a stronger influence. (*Shivtei Kah*)

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## Shabbat

R' Eliyahu Menachem Margaliot z"l (Yerushalayim; died 2022) writes: In the prayer Atah Chonantanu recited on Motzai Shabbat, we address Hashem as "Avinu Malkeinu" / "Our Father, our King," which is not a title we use elsewhere in the Shemoneh Esrei. What makes that description of Hashem appropriate to use specifically on Motzai Shabbat?

R' Margaliot explains: We have two relationships with Hashem—that of children and that of servants. Because of our souls, which Kabbalists refer to as a "piece of G-d above," we are His children and He is our Father. Our bodies, on the other hand, are made of earthly substances, not spiritual ones. When the physical body nevertheless subjugates itself to Hashem, we are His servants and He is our King.

Shabbat is called the "day of the soul." On Shabbat, a person receives a Neshamah Yeteirah / an "extra soul" that illuminates his entire being. During the week, on the other hand, our relationship to Hashem is that of servants to a Master, a relationship characterized by subjugation, not elevation. On Motzai Shabbat, we transition from being Hashem's children to being His servants, and He transitions from being Avinu / our Father to being Malkeinu/ our King. That is why we address Him by both terms as Shabbat departs.

The difference between our two types of relationships with Hashem is reflected in the wording of our Tefilot / prayers. On Shabbat, we do not recite the middle blessings of the Shemoneh Esrei with their requests for all types of material things. Making requests is characteristic of a servant; thus, it is a weekday activity. A child, in contrast, simply basks in the presence of his parent and feels elevated and exalted by the experience, as we read (Yeshayah 1:2), "Children have I raised and exalted." Thus, on Shabbat, we do not make requests. (*Emunat Eliezer: Shabbat*, Introduction)

## **Rabbi Yaakov Menken on this week's Parsha "torah.org"**

### **Yosef's Extra Punishment**

This week we read about the tragic expedition of the spies into the Land of Israel. They returned with a bad report, briefly convincing the Israelites that they would be unable to enter their land. This is why the generation that left Egypt was not allowed to enter Israel, spending forty years (and passing away) in the desert instead.

Rashi explains why this episode is recounted by the Torah immediately following the People of Israel waiting for Miriam to recover from *Tzara'as*, a spiritual blemish which a person received for speaking *lashon hora*, gossip. Rashi teaches, from the Medrash (Tanchuma), that she was punished for her evil speech against her brother, and the spies saw this and did not admonish themselves to do better. Instead, they too spoke gossip, about the Promised Land.

When listing the spies, one from each of the twelve tribes, we find something unique. As we know, there were twelve brothers, one of whom was Levi—but the family of the Levites and Kohanim is not counted together with the “twelve tribes.” Instead, Yaakov told Yosef that Ephraim and Menashe, Yosef’s two sons born before Yaakov came to Egypt, “like Reuven and Shimon they will be to me” [Gen. 48:5]. Ephraim and Menashe are counted as separate tribes among the twelve.

Yosef, however, is not forgotten or left out. At the beginning of the Book of *Bamidbar*, Numbers, when the heads of the tribes are listed, it says “For the children of Yosef, for Ephraim, Elishama ben Amihud; for Menashe, Gamliel ben Pedahzur” [1:10]. Again, when taking a census, the Torah says “For the children of Yosef, for the children of Ephraim... for the children of Menashe...” [1:32, 34]. Ephraim and Menashe are listed one next to the other, with Yosef mentioned before Ephraim.

In our case, however, the Torah does not mention Yosef together with Ephraim. “For Ephraim, Hoshea ben Nun” [13:8], it says. Only three verses later do we find “For the tribe of Yosef, for the tribe of Menashe, Gadi ben Susi” [13:11]. Why are Ephraim and Menashe separated here, and why is Yosef listed only in front of Menashe rather than before Ephraim, as if only Menashe were his son?

The *Da'as Zekeinim miBa'alei HaTosfos* commentary says that this was a punishment for Yosef. Remember that Yosef was described early on as childish, and “bringing a bad report” about his brothers to their father [Gen. 37:2]. Like Miriam and the spies, Yosef, too, had spoken *lashon hora*!

Hoshea, the representative of Ephraim, did not; he was one of the two spies who gave a good report. Moshe called him Yehoshua [see 13:16], and Yehoshua was the one who led the nation into their land forty years later, after Moshe’s passing. Gadi from the tribe of Menashe, however, was one of the majority, the ten spies who returned with a bad report. And this, the *Da'as Zekeinim* says, is why Yosef is mentioned here with Menashe, not credited with being the father of Ephraim or forefather of Yehoshua.

Yosef gossiped about his brothers from a place of immaturity, as the Torah says about him at the time. And he thought he was right to tell his father so that he would admonish the brothers. And, even if it is true that Yosef acted incorrectly, think of all that Yosef endured—being sold by his brothers to a caravan, then sold to another, then sold as a slave in Egypt, then falsely accused and thrown in jail for a crime he did not commit—all because of this one bad deed of speaking gossip about his brothers. Hadn’t he suffered enough?

But it was not simply an added punishment—it came about because the representative of Ephraim was Yehoshua, who passed the very test that Yosef did not. It would not have been right to mention Yosef together with Yehoshua, that he should “look good” by association with Yehoshua, in the very instance where Yehoshua had passed and Yosef had, in fact, failed. This is why Yosef had the extra punishment of being mentioned only later.

Hashem looks over even the smallest aspect of the smallest of our deeds, and (per Yevamos 121) is precise with those closest to him “like a hair’s breadth.” But it is one more example of how negatively the Torah views speaking gossip.

Let us not, then, be like the spies. Let us read about the spies, connect their *lashon hora* with that of Miriam, see even how Yosef is not mentioned with Yehoshua, and, *unlike* the spies, let us admonish ourselves to do better in this area!v

## **Rabbi Yochanan Zweig on this week’s Parsha “torah.org”**

### **With Strings Attached**

*“...and remember all the commandments of Hashem...” (15:39)*

The Torah stipulates that the tzitzis should serve as a reminder of our obligation to perform all of the mitzvos. Rashi explains that the numerical value of the word tzitzis is six hundred (“tzadi” is ninety, “yud” is ten, “tzadi” is ninety, “yud” is ten and “taf” is four hundred), and when we add the eight threads and five knots, we reach a total of six hundred thirteen, corresponding to the six hundred thirteen mitzvos in the Torah.<sup>1</sup> The Ba’alei Tosafos question how Rashi arrives at the number six hundred for the word “tzitzis” when the spelling of the word from the Torah contains only one “yud”. The answer given by the Ba’alei Tosafos is that the word

“tzitzis” is recorded in the Torah three times, and on one of those occasions the word is written “letzitzis”, with a “lamed” which adds an additional value of thirty; by dividing the number thirty into three, for the number of times “tzitzis” is written, we restore the correspondence between the word “tzitzis” and the number six hundred.<sup>2</sup> It seems highly unlikely that upon seeing the tzitzis a person will make these intricate calculations leading him to remember all of the mitzvos of Hashem. Why is remembering the mitzvos expressed in this type of manner?

The Ramban questions Rashi’s explanation that we should include the five knots and eight strings in order to reach a total of six hundred thirteen, for the Talmud teaches that the Torah-mandated obligation of tzitzis involves only the top knot, while the other four are Rabbinically mandated. Therefore, how can Rashi include all five knots in the calculation which is made to fulfill the Torah’s obligation of remembering the mitzvos?<sup>3</sup>

Rashi teaches that the mitzva of tzitzis is equal to all of the other six hundred twelve mitzvos in the Torah. This creates a unifying thread between tzitzis and the other two mitzvos in the parsha, refraining from idol worship and observing the Shabbos, which have the same quality.<sup>4</sup> It is understandable that performing idol worship is equivalent to violating the entire Torah, for it negates Hashem’s supremacy, as is violating the Shabbos, for Shabbos is the affirmation of Hashem as Creator of the universe. What is the basis for tzitzis being equivalent to all of the other mitzvos? Furthermore, a person is not even obligated to wear tzitzis; the requirement of tzitzis from a Torah perspective is only applicable if a person wears a four-cornered garment. How can a mitzva which is not even a constant requirement be so important?

Aside from the perfunctory elements of the mitzva of tzitzis, the mitzva contains another more fundamental concept. The commentaries explain that tzitzis is akin to a uniform which identifies a slave as belonging to his master.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, it is no coincidence that tzitzis is included as a part of the reading of Krias Shema, for wearing tzitzis indicates an ongoing reaffirmation of the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven. It is the extension of the declaration made in Krias Shema. In order to increase the efficacy and potency of the tzitzis as the tool by which a person remembers and reaffirms his commitment to perform the six hundred thirteen mitzvos, i.e the expression of his acceptance of the yoke of Heaven, the Torah states “ve’asu lahem tzitzis” – “and they shall make for themselves the tzitzis”.<sup>6</sup> This means that the reminder does not stem from looking at the tzitzis after donning them, rather the Torah requires that our Sages create a reminder from the tzitzis itself. When a person ties a string around his finger in order to remind himself of something of great significance, it is not the string which is of primary importance, rather that which it is meant to remind him of. Similarly, the Torah instructs our Sages to find symbolic references within the tzitzis so that donning tzitzis itself will be a reminder of our acceptance of the yoke of the Almighty. Therefore, if need be, we can make elaborate calculations, including even Rabbinically mandated stipulations to assign the tzitzis the symbolic representation of the acceptance of all of the mitzvos. It is far more effective a reminder if we are the ones who create the symbolism ourselves.

It is for this reason that the Torah does not mandate wearing tzitzis; if the Torah had, the effectiveness of the tzitzis as a reminder would have been dampened, for the reason to wear the tzitzis would have devolved into an act which is done only to fulfill the Torah imperative. A Rabbinical creation of the constant obligation to wear tzitzis is more effective as the reminder for we have designated its symbolism. Since tzitzis contains the fundamental principle of acceptance of the yoke of the Almighty, it can be grouped with refraining from idol worship and keeping Shabbos.

1.15:39 2.Menachos 39a see Tanchuma Sheach.. 3.15:26 4.15: 41 5.Tos. Menachos 39a, Sefer Hachinuch, Seferno 1 5:39 6.15:38;39,

## Internal Injury

*“Send forth men...” (13:2)*

This week’s parsha introduces the episode of the spies who spoke disparagingly concerning Eretz Yisroel. As a result of the spies’ actions the entire generation of Bnei Yisroel who accepted their evil tidings were doomed to die in the desert.<sup>1</sup> Rashi explains that the reason why this parsha is juxtaposed to the story of Miriam’s affliction with tzora’as recorded at the end of last week’s parsha, is that the spies should have taken a lesson from Miriam regarding the consequences of speaking Loshon Horah.<sup>2</sup> The prohibition of speaking Loshon Horah is amongst the most severe offenses recorded in the Torah. The Chofeitz Chaim enumerates the many positive and negative precepts violated when engaging in Loshon Horah.<sup>3</sup> Why did the spies, who were the greatest leaders of the generation, require the incident with Miriam to teach them a precept which is clearly delineated in the Torah?

The Torah identifies the sin of the spies as “vayatzu dibas ha’aretz asher taru osah” – “and they presented evil tidings concerning the land that they had spied out”.<sup>4</sup> Although we can infer that giving such a negative account of Eretz Yisroel reflected the spies’ deep-rooted lack of faith in Hashem’s ability to fulfill His promise that Bnei Yisroel would enter Eretz Yisroel, the Torah focuses upon the Loshon Horah spoken concerning the Land.<sup>5</sup> Based upon this verse, the Chayei Adam records speaking disparagingly about Eretz Yisroel as a separate prohibition. Why is it so grievous an offense to speak Loshon Horah regarding a piece of land; an inanimate object?



In last week's parsha, immediately after recording the Loshon Horah which Miriam spoke against Moshe, the Torah states "veha'ish Moshe anav me'od" – "and the man Moshe was exceedingly humble".<sup>6</sup> What is the connection between the two verses? Speaking Loshon Horah is generally portrayed as "bein adam l'chaveiro" – "a sin against society", the heinous nature of the sin reflected by its anti-social repercussions. Although the aforementioned is valid, the Torah is revealing to us that the most destructive force which is unleashed when we engage in Loshon Horah is the damage we inflict upon ourselves. The Torah records the exceedingly humble nature of Moshe immediately after Miriam's criticism of him to teach us that he was completely unaffected by her comments. The damage caused by Miriam's words was the damage she caused herself. Loshon Horah causes part of the transgressor to die; this is reflected by the tzora'as – dead flesh, which is a natural by-product of the transgression. Consequently, Aharon pleaded with Moshe to pray for their sister, "al na shei kemeis" – "let her not be like a corpse".<sup>7</sup>

This message was not apparent until the story of Miriam, when it became evident that a person has violated the sin of Lashon Horah even if the subject of the tidings is unaffected. This should have prevented the spies from speaking Loshon Horah, even against an inanimate object.

1.14:21-24 2.13:2 3. See Hilchos Issurei Lashon Horah based on the Sefer Chofetz Chaim 4.13:32 5. Sotah 35a 6.12:3 7.12:12

## **Rabbi Yissocher Frand on this week's Parsha "torah.org"**

### **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 Yonosan ben Uziel interprets this *pasuk* as saying: “**When Moshe saw the humility of Hoshea**, he changed his name to Yehoshua.” The question is: What does Hoshea’s humility have to do with the fear of his being ensnared in the scheme of the *meraglim*?

Rabbeinu Yaakov Yosef (the one and only Chief Rabbi of the City of New York) gives a beautiful interpretation. There are two types of *aveiros*, “standard *aveiros*” and “subtle *aveiros*”. A standard *aveira* is when a person knows something is wrong, but he does it anyway. “I know I am not supposed to do this, but my *Yetzer HaRah* is too strong and I am going to do it regardless!” However, a subtle *aveira* is a much more difficult *aveira* to overcome. That is when you think what you are doing is *amitzvah*. 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 *amitzvah*!”

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 *amitzvah*!

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 *amitzvah*. 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 Canaanites who dwelt on the mountain descended and beat them back to Chormah. (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 *Tzela'fchad*, implying that Tzela'fchad was one of the *m'apilim* (as mentioned in Maseches Shabbos 96b). It is interesting that despite being wrong, Tzela'fchad 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, Tzela'fchad 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 Tzela'fchad's daughters! They protest “Our father died in the desert! 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. Tzela'fchad 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 *rabbanim* 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 Tzela'fchad 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!”

### **Rabbi Yossy Goldman's Sermonette**

#### **Doubts Under Fire**

##### ***Finding faith in perilous times***

It's one of the most frequently asked questions in every serious school of thought. It is a classic that rabbis, philosophers and ethicists alike have had to grapple with over the centuries. There isn't even a Yeshiva where a devout student has not turned to his teacher with the ultimate question, the question of faith. “Rabbi, I'm not sure. I am struggling with my faith. I want to believe, but sometimes I'm just not clear in my own mind.”

While there are different approaches to the problem, some wise mentors would be dismissive of it. ‘Don't take it so seriously,’ they smiled. ‘It's okay. Most of us go through those phases. You are a believer the son of a believer and your natural faith will shine through. Pay no attention to it whatsoever and carry on as if nothing happened. It's a curable disease and, most often, time and experience are the greatest healers.’

If you ever suffered from doubts, perhaps it may comfort you to know that even rabbis have their doubts now and then.

Here's my own personal story.

January 1991. It was just a few days before the deadline of 15 January laid down by President George W Bush Sr. to Saddam Hussein. Get out of Kuwait (which Iraq had invaded) or the United States would attack Iraq. Israel and the Jewish world were in a state of panic. Saddam Hussein was threatening to attack Israel with his menacing Scuds and there were serious fears that he would also use chemical warfare. Israel was, in fact, distributing gas masks to all its citizens. The trepidation was tangible.

We, like all our people around the world, were petrified. Israel, an innocent bystander, had nothing whatsoever to do with the conflict between Iraq and Kuwait, but Saddam Hussein was threatening to unleash his formidable arsenal on Israel. America was advising Israel not to act against him on her own, promising American protection. Indeed, the USA dispatched its famous Patriot missile defence system to be deployed in Israel to stop the Scuds from doing damage. But the situation was very tense and nerve-racking. Every Jew in the world was afraid and anxious to say the least. In every Jewish community there were Prayer Meetings and Emergency Fund-Raising campaigns.

There was, however, one lone voice in the wilderness that was calming and reassuring. My own saintly teacher, the Lubavitcher Rebbe of righteous memory, whose 31<sup>st</sup> Yahrtzeit will soon be observed, continued to reiterate that in his opinion Israel was safe and would be safe. He even advised Israel's government that gas masks would not be necessary.

So there I am in a packed Sydenham Shul, on Friday night, 11 January 1991. Well over a thousand people are in Shul. President Bush's deadline is about to expire. Would America attack Iraq? Would Iraq retaliate against innocent Israel? I had studied the Rebbe's words very carefully and was about to deliver a sermon in Shul. I was going to quote the Rebbe's teachings about Hashem's eyes being upon His holy land and that Israel had nothing to fear. It was meant to be a rousing message of faith and hope designed to put my congregation's mind more at ease.

Then, in middle of *Lecha Dodi*, the little door near my seat in Shul opens a crack and my friend and neighbour, Itz Ginsberg, pokes his head in to give me the latest news.

“Rabbi! I just heard the 6 pm news. Saddam Hussein has fired two Scuds into Israel!”

That’s all. No details. Were they direct hits? Were there casualties, G-d forbid? That’s all he managed to hear on the radio just before Shabbos and no more information was available.

Oh, my G-d! What do I do now? Here I am about to deliver a message of faith to a packed Shul and who knows what’s going on there as I speak? Imagine that I give this stirring, inspiring sermon and then they hear the news and it’s not so good! “So much for the rabbi and his faith.”

I make the following confession in all honesty and humility. For a few minutes I really was in doubt as to what I should do. Maybe I should run up to my office and find some notes of an old sermon about the Parsha of the Week? Perhaps I should feign laryngitis and not speak at all? Or...should I put my courage to the sticking place and deliver my original sermon as planned and prepared and risk the consequences?

For those few minutes I agonized over the decision. I was torn, and my mind was in turmoil. But then, my inner faith came through and I made the right decision. I would deliver the sermon exactly as planned. And I did.

And the rest is history. In all, Saddam Hussein fired 39 Scuds on Israel. And there were 39 heavenly miracles as not one of them caused even a single casualty! And there were no chemical warheads, and the gas masks were not necessary.

Thank G-d, my faith prevailed over my doubts.

It’s very much the same situation today. Iran is firing hundreds of ballistic missiles at Israel, in civilian areas. While there have been a few direct hits and a number of terrible casualties, the miracles far outweigh the failures. Thank G-d, we have managed to intercept some 90% of those devastating missiles. If not, we would have had tens of thousands of casualties, G-d forbid! And what Israel has done in Iran is unprecedented!

But it’s not yet over and we have doubts, don’t we? Understandably, we worry.

Our *parsha* this week, *Shelach*, tells the story of the 12 spies sent by Moses on a reconnaissance mission of Canaan before the Israelites were to conquer it and make it the Holy Land. Tragically, the spies lacked the faith in G-d that He could help deliver us miraculously from the terrifying Canaanite warriors. Sadly, their lack of faith was contagious, and the entire people wept at the prospects of being wiped out. As a result, they spent 40 years in the wilderness and only the next generation would merit to enter the Promised Land.

I understand doubts. It’s normal. Even rabbis have their moments. But we need to fortify ourselves with the inner faith and trust in G-d that we all do have. It’s there inside each of us, but sometimes we have to dig deeper to discover it.

With resolve, courage, and trust our doubts can be overcome. May we see a decisive victory over our enemies and the ultimate peace with Moshiach Now.

## **The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust**

### **Shabbat 5772 Shelach**

#### **The Real World**

**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?