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Covenant & Conversation Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from Lord Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 5767]

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Listen carefully to the report brought back by the spies sent by Moses to examine the promised land:

They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan." Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the

Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

This is the language of fear and demoralization. They are big, we are small. They are strong, we are weak. They do not fear us, but we fear them. We cannot prevail.

Was this, in fact, the case? As the parallel passage in the book of Joshua- read as the haftarah to the sedra of Shelach - makes clear, the spies could not have been more wrong. A generation later, Joshua too sent spies. They stayed at the house of a prostitute named Rahab, who turned out to be a heroine in her own right. Hearing about the spies, the king of Jericho sent men to capture them, but Rahab hid them and saved their lives. What is more interesting is what she tells them of the feelings of her people when they heard that the Israelites were on their way:

Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, "I know that the LORD has given this land to you 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. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your G-d is in heaven above and on the earth below."

The people of Jericho were anything but giants. They were terrified. The spies of Moses' day should have known this. They had already said in the song they sang at the Red Sea:

The nations will hear and tremble; anguish will grip the people of Philistia. The chiefs of Edom will be terrified, the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling, the people of Canaan will melt away; terror and dread will fall upon them.

It was not the Israelites who should have been afraid of the people of the land. It was they who were afraid of the Israelites. How did the spies come so to misinterpret the situation?

There is a fascinating midrashic passage - cited by Rashi in his commentary - with far-reaching implications.

How were they [the spies], to know [the people's] strength? [By looking at their cities], "are they unwallled or fortified? If they live in unwallled cities, they are strong and trust in their own strength. If, however, they live in fortified cities, they are weak and insecure.

The spies, suggests the midrash, misread the signs. They correctly noted and reported that the cities were fortified, but they drew the wrong conclusion:

But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities of fortified and very large.

Moses puts it even more strongly in recounting the events 40 years later to the next generation:

But you were unwilling to go up; you rebelled against the command of the LORD your . You grumbled in your tents and said, "The LORD hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us. Where can we go? Our brothers have made us lose heart. They say, "The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Anakites there."

Clearly, the sight of the cities made a deep impression on the spies. This makes psychological sense, and it accords with historical fact. The cities in ancient Canaan were indeed surrounded by high and thick walls which made them seem impregnable.

It is easy to enter into the mindset of the spies. They had been living in the wilderness, in fragile, temporary dwellings. They had not seen a city for some time. The fortifications surrounding towns like Jericho must have been awe-inspiring. But they did not stop to consider what this might mean in terms of the strength of the opposition they faced.

According to the Midrash they drew precisely the wrong conclusion: the cities are strong, therefore the people are strong. In fact the opposite was the case: the cities are strong, therefore the people are weak. People who are strong do not have to live behind defensive walls.

In the Guide of the Perplexed, Moses Maimonides gives a daring interpretation to the whole episode. It occurs in the context of one of the most controversial theories he advanced in that work, namely that sacrifices are not at the heart of Judaism as a way of serving G-d. Instead they were commanded because the people, children of their time, were not yet ready for a pure "service of the heart." They were surrounded by cultures, whether in Egypt or Canaan, that saw sacrifice as the natural way of winning the favour of the gods. To demand of them that they discontinue sacrifice entirely would be like lifting them from antiquity to modernity. It was impossible - humanly impossible.

But how can we speak of impossibility in the context of G-d, for whom all things are possible? Maimonides' answer is simple and profound. G-d desires the free worship of free human beings. Therefore even G-d must work with the grain of human nature - and it is simply impossible for human beings to change overnight. G-d never intervenes to change human nature, for were He to do so, He would take away their freewill which was the very point of creating humanity in the first place.

What support can Maimonides bring for this claim? The answer is the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. This is what he says:

There is a passage in the Torah which contains this idea, namely: " led them not through the way of the land of the Philistine is, although that was near; for said, less the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt. led the people about through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea" (Ex. 13: 17). Here, led the people by a circuitous route, not the direct one He originally intended, because He feared that they might encounter hardships too great for their strength. He took them by another road in order to achieve his objective . . . It was the result of 's wisdom that the Israelites were led about in the wilderness until they acquired courage. For it is a well-known fact that traveling in the desert, and being deprived of physical enjoyments such as bathing, produce courage . . . And besides, another generation arose during the wanderings that had not been accustomed to degradation and slavery.

What is striking about this analysis is that it does not mention that the Israelites were condemned to spend forty years in the desert only because of the sin of the spies. Maimonides almost makes it seem as if knew in advance that people would prove unable to muster the courage needed to fight the battles of conquest, and that it would take a new generation, born in freedom, to do so.

Thus understood, the episode of the spies is a powerful commentary on the experience of Jews in the modern age.

Jews were, in John Murray Cuddihy's telling phrase, "latecomers to modernity." Unlike Christians, they had not been prepared for it through the long centuries between the Reformation (1517) and Emancipation, which spread throughout Europe in the course of the 19th century.

It was an immense and sudden challenge. For the first time in the history of the Diaspora, they were being offered a place in the mainstream of society. But the promise came at a price. They were expected to integrate, adopting the manners and mores of the surrounding culture. It spelled the end of the ghetto.

In one way, this was good news. The ghetto condemned them to being - as Max Weber put it - a "pariah people." But in another, it was a momentous crisis. Until then, Jewish life had been a totality, infusing every aspect of existence with a distinctively Jewish flavour - dress, food, the Yiddish language, the Bet Din which resolved internal disputes, and the rich literatures, sacred and secular, which Jews had accumulated. Now they were being asked to fit their faith into essentially Protestant dimensions, a "religion" confined largely to private life. A measure of how radical a demand this was is the fact that before the nineteenth century there was no word for "Judaism." There was Torah,

there were Jews, and there was Jewish life. The question was: could Jews become Europeans in culture, while remaining Jews in faith and practice? Could they - as 19th century Jews themselves put it - be "people in the street, and Jews at home"?

It was a formidable challenge, a sudden break with 18 centuries of habit - all the more so because, underneath the veneer of tolerance, many European societies remained ferociously hostile to Jews. Within decades, it shattered Jewry into fragments. Some were only too keen to assimilate. They were willing to give up key elements of Jewish faith and life, from the dietary laws to belief in the return to Zion. Others, fully aware of the danger to Jewish continuity, retreated into a self-created ghetto. A few - the most famous was Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch - managed the delicate balancing act. Jews could be culturally European (Hirsch himself loved German poetry) while remained uncompromising in their religious practice. The synthesis was widely known as Torah im derekh eretz, "Torah combined with [secular] culture."

The entire story, viewed in retrospect, is deeply tragic. The countries - France and Germany in particular - that most loudly proclaimed their liberalism gave birth to the most persistent anti-Semitism. Already by the end of the 19th century, far-seeing Jews, some religious, some secular, had already reached the conclusion that European emancipation had failed. That was when Zionism was born (a more detailed account can be found in my book Arguments for the Sake of Heaven). A half-century later, the Holocaust had taken place.

Looking back on those years, it is hard not to feel the force of Maimonides' analysis. People cannot change overnight. What was asked of Jews was unrealistic, even inhuman. It was precisely because of this that Western societies today have adopted a different policy. In Britain it is called "multiculturalism." The concept was first formulated by an American Jew, Horace Kallen, in 1915. He called it, as many still do, "pluralism." Minorities are no longer required to give up their identity, traditions and sense of community in order qualify as citizens. Indeed, the change has gone further. Today we recognize that societies are not threatened, but enlivened and enlarged, by cultural diversity.

Time has passed, and the West has changed. To be sure, anti-Semitism has not disappeared, but that is another subject for another time. The question has therefore returned: what is the appropriate mode of engagement between Jews and the wider society? To this, the Midrash suggests a powerful answer. Those who are strong do not need to hide behind defensive walls.

Two centuries ago, segregation and the voluntary ghetto might have been the right response. Jews were not ready for the challenge of Europe and Europe was not ready for the challenge of the Jews. But now is not then. Ours is not the age of the spies but of their descendants, born in freedom. We have had time enough to realize that we can be at home in Western culture without it calling into question Jewish faith or Jewish life. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's dream - that Jews could become a moral and spiritual influence on the societies of which they are a part - did not come true in his lifetime, but it has in ours.

The model is Maimonides. For it was he who showed that one could be a supreme exponent of Jewish law (his halakhic work, the Mishneh Torah, is perhaps the greatest ever written) while at the same time contributing to philosophy, medicine and many other disciplines of his time. Of course, there was only one Maimonides, and not everyone has the strength to live in a world without walls. But the story of the spies tells us that our fears are sometimes exaggerated. Judaism is strong enough to withstand any challenge. The question is now as it was then: do we have the confidence of our faith?

INSIGHTS INTO THE DAILY DAF brought to you by Kollel Iyun Hadaf of Yerushalayim daf@dafyomi.co.il <http://www.dafyomi.co.il>
SOTAH 34 Rabbi Mordechai Kornfeld

2) **KALEV'S PRAYER QUESTION:** The Gemara relates that Kalev went to pray in Chevron at the burial place of the Avos and to ask for mercy that he be saved from the evil scheme of the Meraglim. The Gemara says that Yehoshua did not need to go pray at the burial place of the Avos because Moshe Rabeinu had already prayed for him to be saved from the evil scheme of the Meraglim. The Torah says that since Kalev had a "Ru'ach Acheres," "a different spirit," he was rewarded by being given the city of Chevron.

Why did Moshe Rabeinu pray only for Yehoshua and not for Kalev?

ANSWERS: (a) The simple answer is that a Rabbi's prayers are far more potent when he prays for a close Talmid. Yehoshua, who was a close Talmid of Moshe Rabeinu, would be protected by the prayer of his Rabbi. In contrast, Kalev -- who did not have the same relationship with Moshe Rabeinu -- needed to pray for himself since Moshe's prayer would not be as effective for him.

This is also why Kalev was granted a specific reward for his righteousness, the city of Chevron, while Yehoshua received no specific reward. Since Kalev had to struggle with his Yetzer ha'Ra and pray from the depths of his heart in order to reject the plan of the Meraglim, he was rewarded. Yehoshua never entertained any thoughts of joining the Meraglim because Moshe Rabeinu had prayed for him. Since Kalev's struggle was greater, he was rewarded. (See ALSHICH to Bamidbar 14:22; OR HA'CHAIM to Bamidbar 14:24.)

(b) The CHAFETZ CHAIM (Parshas Shelach) suggests a different approach. He says that there are two types of Tzadikim. One Tzadik protests loudly as soon as he sees anyone do something wrong. The other Tzadik does not say anything, but instead he waits for the opportune time to speak up and explain to the wrongdoer what he did wrong in order to influence him to do Teshuvah.

Each of the two approaches has an advantage and a disadvantage. The advantage of the first approach is that the Tzadik will not be influenced by the evil ways of the others. However, the disadvantage is that his words have less of a chance of influencing them, and they might even attempt to physically harm him in order to stop him from rebuking them. The advantage of the second approach is that the Tzadik's words are more likely to have an effect, but the disadvantage is that by remaining silent in the face of evil he may become desensitized to the sins that he constantly witnesses, until the sin eventually becomes light in his eyes as well.

Moshe Rabeinu knew that Yehoshua was the first type of Tzadik. Moshe Rabeinu did not need to pray that Yehoshua not be persuaded to join the Meraglim in their evil ways, because he knew that Yehoshua would protest loudly and reject them from the start. However, Moshe Rabeinu realized that he did need to pray to Hash-m to protect Yehoshua from the plots the Meraglim might make to harm him so that Yehoshua not foil their plans.

Kalev, on the other hand, was the second type of Tzadik, and therefore Moshe Rabeinu did not need to pray that he be protected from physical harm. Instead, Kalev needed protection from falling into the trap of the Yetzer ha'Ra and following the scheme of the Meraglim. One person can pray for another person only to be protected from physical harm, but not from being seduced by the Yetzer ha'Ra. That is why Moshe Rabeinu's prayer would be effective only to protect Kalev from physical harm, but not to protect him from his Yetzer ha'Ra. Kalev would have to fight that battle himself by praying from the depths of his heart in Chevron. This is the meaning of the verse which says that Kalev was of a "different spirit" -- he was "Echad b'Peh v'Echad b'Lev," what he said was not what he thought (Rashi). He told the Meraglim that he agreed with them, but later when he found the opportune time he displayed his true intention, to foil the plot of the Meraglim.

1) **WERE THE SPIES RIGHTEOUS OR WICKED QUESTION:** The Gemara expounds the verse, "And they went, and they returned" (Bamidbar 13:26), and says that "just as the Meraglim returned with evil

plans, when they departed they already had evil intentions." This is also evident from the Gemara earlier (34b) which says that the names of the Meraglim (which the Torah lists) hint to the evil intentions they had before they departed.

RASHI on the Chumash (Bamidbar 13:3), however, explains that when the Meraglim were chosen, the verse says that they were all "Anashim," which means that they were esteemed people and were righteous at the time.

How can Rashi's explanation be reconciled with the Gemara which says that they were evil from the outset?

ANSWERS: The OR HA'CHAIM suggests a number of answers to this question.

(a) The verse (Bamidbar 13:2) says that Hash-m told Moshe Rabeinu, "Send men for you" ("Shelach Lecha Anashim"), implying that the Meraglim were "Anashim" only in the eyes of Moshe Rabeinu but not in the eyes of Hash-m. Hash-m saw deep in their hearts that they were not really the Tzadikim that Moshe Rabeinu thought they were. (See also KLI YAKAR.)

(b) The Or ha'Chaim suggests further that when Hash-m said, "Send men for you," He meant that only while they were standing in front of Moshe Rabeinu were they Tzadikim. The moment they departed they became Resha'im. That is why their names allude to their sin.

The Or ha'Chaim explains why the Meraglim changed so drastically. There is a principle that "Shali'ach Shel Adam Kemoso," the Shali'ach of a person is like the sender. The Mishnah in Berachos (34a) states that if a Shali'ach Tzibur makes a mistake while he leads the Tzibur in prayer, it is a bad sign for the Tzibur on whose behalf he prays. This is because what the Shali'ach does is influenced by the traits of the person who sent him. Therefore, if he makes a mistake, it is because the person who sent him was not deserving, and not because of the Shali'ach's own lack of merits. Hash-m told Moshe Rabeinu that he should be the one to send the Meraglim, since Moshe Rabeinu had proper intentions for sending Meraglim to Eretz Yisrael. (He sought to encourage the people by showing them the splendor of Eretz Yisrael.) However, the rest of the nation had evil intentions when they asked that Meraglim be sent (Rashi to Devarim 1:22). The nation was afraid of war. The Meraglim went as emissaries of the nation and not as emissaries of Moshe Rabeinu, and therefore they were influenced by the evil intentions of the nation, and thus they became corrupt themselves as soon as they accepted the Shelichus of the people. (See also MAHARAL in Gur Aryeh, Parshas Shelach.)

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POINT BY POINT SUMMARY OF THE DAF

prepared by P. Feldman of Kollel Iyun Hadaf daf@dafyomi.co.il,

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Sotah 34 THE MERAGLIM

(a) Based on this, we can calculate the size of the cluster of grapes that the Meraglim took (we assume that they took one as heavy as they could carry) - "they carried it on a pole, with two people." (b) Question: Always, two people carry something on a pole! (c) Answer: Rather, the verse teaches that it was on two poles. (d) (R. Yitzchak): There were (two) poles bearing the load, and (two) poles under the poles bearing the load. 1. Eight Meraglim carried the cluster, one took a pomegranate, and one took a date. 2. Yehoshua and Kalev did not carry fruits, either because they were too important, or because they refused to assist in the plot to dissuade Yisrael from coming to Eretz Yisrael. (e) (R. Ami or R. Yitzchak Nafcha): According to R. Yehudah, Yisrael crossed the Jordan the way they camped (a square 12 Mil by 12 Mil). According to R. Elazar, we crossed one by one (therefore, the water stacked up very high. Tosfos - R. Yehudah does not mean exactly like they camped, for the Yarden is only 50 Amos wide, and Yehoshua addressed all of Yisrael while they were all inside! Rather, they were 12 Mil long, like they camped, and stood densely to fit within 50 Amos width.)

34b-----34b

(f) (The other of R. Ami or R. Yitzchak Nafcha): Both Tana'im agree that Yisrael crossed the Jordan like they camped. R. Yehudah holds that people walk as fast as water flows, R. Elazar b'Rebbi Shimon holds that water flows faster than people walk. (g) (Reish Lakish): "Send for yourself men" - if you (Moshe) want to. One does not choose a bad portion for himself. (Hashem would not tell him to send Meraglim, knowing that the outcome will be bad.) (h) (Reish Lakish): Moshe said "it was good in my eyes", but not in Hashem's eyes. (i) (R. Chiya bar Aba): "V'Yachperu (they will search) the land for us" - the Meraglim intended to disgrace the land - "v'Chofrah (will be shamed) the moon..." (j) (R. Yitzchak): We have a tradition that the name of each spy relates to his deeds. The only one we know is Sesur ben Micha'el. 1. He was Soser (contradicted) the deeds of Hashem. He made Him(self - this is a euphemism) Mach (weak). (k) (R. Yochanan): We can also explain Nachbi ben Vafsi. Hichbi (he hid) the words of Hashem; Pise'a (he skipped) the attributes of Hashem. (l) Question: Why does it say "they went up to the south, and he came to Chevron"? It should say 'they came!' (m) Answer (Rava): Kalev separated from the counsel of the Meraglim, and came alone to the graves of the Avos, to ask the Avos to request mercy for him, lest he accede to the Meraglim's counsel. 1. Moshe already prayed for Yehoshua - "Moshe called Hoshe'a bin Nun 'Yehoshua'" - Kah (Hashem) should be Mosh'i'a (save) you from the counsel of Meraglim. 2. "My servant Kalev. (I will bring him to the land to which he went, and his seed will inherit it." We know that Chevron was give to Kalev (Yehoshua 14:13,14).

3) CHEVRON (a) "There (in Chevron) were Achiman, Sheshai, and Talmai..." Achiman was MeYuMaN (strongest) of his Achim (brothers). Sheshai made craters in the ground (where he stepped, like pillars of Shesh (marble)). Talmai made the ground like Telamim (furrows, where he walked). 1. Alternatively, Achiman built Anas, Sheshai built Alash, and Talmai built Talbush. (b) "Children of the Anak (giant)" - because of their great height, the sun seemed to shine around their necks like an Anak (necklace). (c) Question: What does it mean "Chevron was Nivnesah seven years (before Tzo'an of Miztrayim)"? 1. It cannot mean that it was built earlier. One does not build a house for his younger son before his older son! i. Chevron is in Eretz Kena'an, Cham's fourth son. Miztrayim was Cham's second son. (d) Answer: Rather, it was seven times more Mevuneh (fertile) than Tzo'an. 1. Chevron is the rockiest part of Eretz Yisrael, therefore it was used for burial. Miztrayim is the best land in Chutz la'Aretz - "like the garden of Hashem, like Eretz Miztrayim." Tzo'an is the best part of Miztrayim - "his nobles were in Tzo'an." Still, Chevron was seven times more fertile. (e) Question: Is Chevron really rocky?! 1. (Rav Avya): "At the end of 40 years, Avshalom said to the king 'I will go...' - he went to bring sheep from Chevron. 2. (Beraiisa): Rams are brought from Mo'av, and sheep from Chevron. (f) Answer: Yes! Because it is rocky, it was used for grazing (grass grows there)!

Sotah 35

1) THE SPIES RETURN (a) "They went and they came (to Moshe)" equates their going to their return. 1. Just like they returned with an evil counsel, they went with an evil counsel. (b) (R. Yochanan) "And they said '... (the land flows with milk and honey.) but it is for naught, for the inhabitants are (too) strong.' (They began with praise of the land, because) if Lashon ha'Ra (slander) does not include some truth at the beginning, it will not last. (c) (Rabah): "And Kalev hushed the nation towards Moshe" - he enticed them with words. 1. He saw that when Yehoshua tried to speak, they silenced him. If one's head is cut off, can he speak?! 2. He reasoned - if I defend Eretz Yisrael, they will silence me also. 3. He said 'is this the only thing Moshe did to us?!' They thought that he was going to criticize Moshe, so they let him continue. 4. He took us out of Miztrayim, he split the sea for us, he brought manna down for us. If he would tell us to make ladders and ascend to Heaven, wouldn't we listen?! "We will go up and inherit the land!" 5. (R. Chanina bar Papa): "The Meraglim who went with him said 'we cannot... he (the nation there) is stronger Mimenu.'" Do not read 'than us', rather, 'than He.' (Rashi, Tosfos Erchin 15b - the word is pronounced the same either way. Ibn Ezra (Shemos 1:9) and Teshuvah Rashba (attributed to Ramban) 232 - western Sefarim (which follow the tradition of Eretz Yisrael) have a Dagesh (dot) in the Nun either way, but eastern Sefarim (which follow the tradition of Bavel) have no dot when it means 'than us'.) i. It is as if they said that the Owner of the house cannot retrieve His Kelim from His house. (d) (d) (Rava): "The land consumes its inhabitants" - Hash-m intended to help them, but they viewed it negatively; 1. Wherever the Meraglim went, an important Kena'ani died. This distracted the Kena'anim, so they did not occupy themselves with the Meraglim.

2. Others explain that Iyov had died, and all were busy eulogizing him.

(e) (Rav Mesharshiya): "We were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and also in their eyes" - this was a falsity!

1. They could know how they viewed themselves, but they could not know how the Kena'anim viewed them!

(f) Rejection: They could know! The Kena'anim would give a first meal to a mourner under a cedar tree. When the Meraglim were seen, they climbed into trees. They heard the Kena'anim say that they saw ant-sized people in the trees.

(g) "The whole Tzibur raised their voices and cried" - it was the eve of the Tishah b'Av. Hash-m said 'they cried for no reason. I will fix the day to be a day of crying for generations.'

(h) (R. Chiya bar Aba): "The whole Tzibur said that they will stone them (Yehoshua and Kalev). And the honor of Hash-m (appeared in the Ohel Mo'ed)" - they threw stones up towards Hash-m.

(i) (Reish Lakish): "The men who gave a bad report of the land died harshly in a plague" - this was a bizarre death.

1. Opinion #1 (R. Chanina bar Papa): Their tongues hung out and stretched to their bellybuttons. Worms came from their tongues and entered their bellybuttons and vice-versa.

2. Opinion #2 (Rav Papa): They died of croup.

Coming and Going By Rabbi Moshe Hubner

In the beginning of Parashas Shelach, we are told about how the Bnei Yisrael approached Moshe Rabbeinu and requested that some special people be chosen to survey the land of Eretz Yisrael before the rest of the nation entered. Moshe "discussed" the idea with Hashem, who gave His permission, and then Moshe Rabbeinu chose twelve men; one from each tribe.

The Torah calls them spies as "men heads of tribes" before we are told their specific names or which shevatim they represent. Wasn't it a given that they were men? Certainly Moshe Rabbeinu would not have included women among his choices. Rashi explains that the extra word "men" is a reference to the fact that they were men of stature. Rashi adds that they were on an especially high level at that point because it was the start of their mission, and they had yet to sin. It is safe to assume that Moshe Rabbeinu chose the highest caliber of people to represent the nation; the fact that they were "heads of tribes" confirms that fact.

Later on, the Torah tells us, "They went and returned" (passuk 26), and then goes on to describe the details of their forthcoming travels. Why does it mention that "they returned" here, rather than at the end of their journey?

Rashi explains that just as they left as non-kosher people, so they returned in the same way. In other words, they went as they returned, and so actually failed their mission from the moment they left the midbar.

These two Rashis seem to contradict themselves. At first, we are told that the meraglim were men of stature, and then we are informed that they were just as bad when they left as the day they returned to ruin everything and speak against the Land of Israel and Hashem.

So what were they really - pure and good, or tamei and bad? At what point did their level of stature deteriorate, and why?

Rav Shimshon of Astropli starts with the words of passuk 20, which describes the time of year that the meraglim were sent out as the zman of "bikurei anavim", which consists of the months of Tamuz and Av.

Rav Shimshon explains that the yetzer hara has stronger powers and exerts greater control over man during the months of Tamuz and Av, citing Kabbalah sefarim as the source. Just thinking about what transpires during the summer lends credence to this statement - many Rabbanim and moros believe that a full year of chinuch lessons can be entirely lost in these two months alone, if talmidim are left without structure and guidance after a full year of following a strict routine.

So too was it regarding the meraglim. They returned from Eretz Canaan on 9 Av, setting off a chain of events that still resonates with us today. That is the night that Bnei Yisrael cried, and, because of their baseless tears, on that very same night many years later, both batei mikdash were destroyed.

The failed mission of the meraglim set off a sequence of events that has had consequences until today,

We know that the decree to the people of the dor hamidbar was that they would remain in the desert for forty years, and over that time nearly everyone would pass away. It was midah knegged midah – the meraglim traveled for forty days; a harmful mission that resulted in the nation having to wander slowly through the desert for forty years, while the people from that generation passed away.

When we count forty days backward from the ninth of Av, upon which the batei mikdash were destroyed, we realize that the mission began on the last day of Sivan, encompassing the month of Tamuz and the first nine days of Av.

Following the above reasoning, when the meraglim left the midbar, they were still tahor, as Rashi states, because it was still Sivan, and so were able to withstand the pressures of the yetzer hara. As soon as the first day passed, however, and Tamuz began, they were subject to the most influential time of year, and they succumbed to his malevolent pressure.

R' Shimshon of Astropoli further explains that the letters of the Hebrew alphabet that come before the letters that make up the word anavim, as in "bikurei anavim," spell out "samel," which is the name of the yetzer hara. (Samech comes before ayin; mem comes before nun; aleph comes before beis; and lamed comes before mem.)

We know that no word of the Torah is wasted; clearly, there is more to what we are being told than merely the time of year of the spies' journey.

Parashas Shelach is read at the end of Sivan, right before Tamuz. We are currently in the same time frame the meraglim were in when they embarked on the journey that would not only affect their personal futures, but would have ramifications on the course of all future generations. Before they left, they were on a higher level than any of us will ever be; yet that didn't allow them to successfully overcome the yetzer hara's pull. A great deal of their weakness was, as we have just been shown, a result of the season it happened to be. Perhaps if they had striven to fortify themselves prior to leaving, they would have built up an arsenal strong enough to counter the evil influence that eventually led them to their own destruction.

We must learn from their mistakes. We have only a few days to strengthen ourselves before Tamuz begins. If we are to overcome the yearnings caused by the yetzer hara, we must strengthen ourselves now, while we still have "extra" power. The key is to prepare, and hopefully that preparation will enable us to recognizing when evil forces are at play.

The Chidah brings down that originally, the Yamim Tovim were going to be in Tamuz, Av, and Elul. Because of the sins of the nation and the negative influences that are so strong during these months, they were pushed off. Thus, we celebrate Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkos all during the month of Tishrei.

Additionally, we are told that when Moshiach arrives, all negative will be turned into positive (Zechariah 8:19). For example, all of our present-day fast days will become days of celebration.

If we begin this summer with creating an atmosphere in which we do not allow ourselves to be guided, or even worse, controlled, by the yetzer hara, then we are telling Hakadosh Baruch Hu that we are ready for these months of sorrow to be turned into months of simchah shel mitzvah, of joyous celebration, filled with spiritual pursuits and the ruling of the yetzer tov. In doing so, we are also telling Hashem that we

are ready for Moshiach to reveal himself for all of our benefit, bimheirah biyameinu, amen!

L'zecher Nishmas Nachum Eliezer ben Tzvi Hersh
Rabbi Moshe Hubner is an author and Maggid Shiur who has been giving lectures in the tri-state area for more than a decade. He has published five sefarim, including the English-language two-volume Chain of Thought: Torah Linked Through the Ages; Strength Through Fire: A Chizuk Handbook; and three Hebrew sefarim, including Uryan T'Lisai, a best-selling commentary on Megillas Rus. He can be reached at hubners@gmail.com or 347-439-7154

Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
<info@jewishdestiny.com>
Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha :: SHLACH :: Rabbi Berel Wein

I have often felt and even publicly stated that the relationship of Jews to the Land of Israel, just as their relationship to the Torah itself, is the litmus test of being Jewish – not necessarily strict fulfillment of observances per se but being Jewish and faithful to one's people. It is ironic in the extreme that the two noisiest factions within the Jewish world today – the leftist, liberal and completely acculturated section of Jewish society on one hand and some of the rigorously observant section of Orthodoxy on the other – are both in agreement that Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel is somehow not a good thing for Jews or the world generally.

Apparently opposition to the State of Israel makes for strange bedfellows. There are many conflicting causes to this state of affairs. But the bottom line is always the bottom line – opposition to the existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish state.

This week's parsha with its description of the bitter opposition by the leaders of the tribes of Israel in the desert to the planned entry of the Jewish people into the Land of Israel points out how this attitude of negativism spelled tragedy for the entire people of that generation. Midrash and Talmud advance compelling arguments as to what these leaders thought and how they justified their error to themselves. But again, righteous self justification is not a valid reason for standing in opposition to Jewish control over the Land of Israel. Lack of faith, lack of judgment, personal conflicts of interest, fear of the unknown, misplaced theology and the inertia of exile all combined to push these previously great leaders of Israel over the brink of rebellion and despair. This week's parsha is one of the saddest in the entire Torah.

The idea of the importance of avoiding slander and not speaking evil about others is expanded in this week's parsha to include the prohibition of slandering the Land of Israel as well. Just as evil speech is forbidden even if it be true but is of no purposeful or permitted purpose, so too does this injunction against evil speech apply to the Land of Israel. The Land of Israel is an inanimate object not capable of feeling the hurt that evil speech causes when directed against fellow human beings. Nevertheless, such speech against it is forbidden for it damages the speaker and not only the object about which he or she spoke.. In last week's parsha we read about Miriam and Aaron speaking about Moshe. If the greatest people of Israel fall victim to engaging in such speech then others feel a right to do so as well, as this week's parsha makes clear. Israeli governmental policies can be scrutinized and criticized. Leadership can be challenged and changed. But the basic right of the Jewish people to live in the Land of Israel under Jewish

sovereignty is not given to discussion and argument. I think that this is the clear message to be derived from even a cursory reading of this week's parsha.
Shabat shalom

From Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>
To Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>
Subject Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Parshas Shelach
Send forth men. (13:2)

In his explanation of the juxtaposition of the episode concerning the spies upon the incident with Miriam HaNeviah's "gossip" about Moshe Rabbeinu, Rashi takes a stern approach toward the meraglim, spies. The nation had been taught the severity of malicious gossip, having seen first-hand the punishment wrought against Miriam. Yet, the "wicked" spies did not learn their lesson from this experience, and they were not deterred from slandering the Land. Horav Boruch Sorotzkin, zl, notes that Rashi is underscoring the fact that the meraglim did not take heed of Miriam's punishment, rather than their actual slander. Implicit in his words is the notion that it was not the actual slander against Eretz Yisrael that did them in; rather, it was their lack of perception, ignoring that which glared at them in plain sight, sending a critical message: even the most erudite, sagacious and G-d-fearing Jew can err and be guilty of a sin. Aharon and Miriam somehow erred in their perception of Moshe, causing Miriam to say something needlessly that was perceived to be slanderous. The meraglim should have derived a lesson from this incident. Because they were indifferent, they fell into a nadir of sin that was inconsistent with their spiritual plateau.

The Rosh Yeshivah elevates it by comparing one who does not observe, listen, acknowledge and learn from the experience to a kafui tov, ingrate. After all, Hashem has given him sensory perception for a purpose. To not use this gift wisely is the height of ingratitude. Man is surrounded by a world which is his to discover. He is influenced by events which come to his attention - both positive and negative. What he derives from the episodes which he continues to confront throughout life will often determine how he acts and how he will turn out. Hashem has enabled him by supplying him with the tools for discernment. If he does not use them, then he has only himself to blame. This is the lesson that we should derive from the tragedy of the meraglim.

Precisely what was the sin of the meraglim, a sin which unwittingly tainted all of Klal Yisrael, one whose far-reaching effect disturbs us to this very day? Indeed, Ramban indicates that Klal Yisrael's request for spies was reasonable. An attacking army requires intelligence concerning the country it is attempting to conquer. They erred in not factoring in their special circumstances. A nation that had witnessed the saving Presence of Hashem among them should have conjured up enough faith to follow the Cloud - without question. Moshe allowed their request, because he saw that they were dead-set on this course. To deter them would increase the friction, thereby creating an even bigger issue. Thus, he accepted their evil plan, rather than blow the situation out of proportion.

In other words, the people erred by assuming that it would be best to minimize the miracles that accompanied them, rather than attack the land by conventional methods, i.e. spies. Their mistake was in downplaying their miraculous existence. A nation that is subject to such supernatural intervention should abandon all desire for human endeavor. They erred, and Moshe did not want to exacerbate the issue beyond control.

How could the dor de'ah, "generation of knowledge," make such a simple mistake? Clearly, they knew better than to think they needed the assistance of spies in order to successfully conquer the land.

In his Michtav M'Elياهو, Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, quotes the Yalkut, which teaches that the nation did not consciously and deliberately send spies as an exercise in military strategy. They were accustomed to miracles, and there was no reason that they could not continue in their supernatural state. In addition, the yetzer hora did not confront them overtly, because it did not have a chance to convince them to abandon their belief in Hashem's ability to lead them into the Land. So, what was it? It was the yetzer hora adopting a much more subtle tactic - a tactic that blindsided the Jewish nation and left them open to falling into his crafty hands. The Yalkut relates the Jews' request: "Hashem has promised us that we will enter the Land of Canaan and inherit all of their wealth... 'houses filled with good things.' The Canaanites know that we are coming. If they hide their property, and we find nothing, it will create a great chillul Hashem, desecration of Hashem's Name.

Hashem's word will be annulled. This cannot be. Therefore, let us send spies to reconnoiter the land and discover where they are hiding their wealth." A very crafty ploy. Not only were they now not doing an aveirah, sin, they were acting appropriately. It was a mitzvah! They were preventing a chillul Hashem. How commendable! They did not want to lose the gold and silver, since this might besmirch Hashem's Name. It was not about the money - it was all about Hashem, or so they claimed, because so they thought. It was not the rational dor de'ah speaking; it was a nation duped by the yetzer hora. While being victimized by the yetzer hora somewhat explains their actions, it does not generate absolution for their sin. How did a nation who had encountered Hashem at Sinai and who had a unique knowledge of the wiles of the yetzer hora fall prey to such a ruse? How were they unable to detect their own true motives? Rav Dessler posits that this explains how deeply embedded in their psyche the error must have been. Even Moshe fell into the trap! An inner tendency of the heart can be so well concealed that even a Moshe Rabbeinu can err about its true nature. Frightening, but true.

Send forth men, if you please, and let them spy out the land of Canaan. (13:2) Rashi says that the implication is that Hashem gave Moshe Rabbeinu permission to send spies, but left the final decision up to him. This idea presents a number of difficulties. Hashem knew that the meraglim, spies, would return from their reconnaissance of Eretz Yisrael with slanderous reports. The Almighty is aware of all that is concealed from man. Why did He permit this debacle to occur? When Moshe approached Hashem with the people's request, the Almighty should have responded with a resounding, "No!" In addition, upon the meraglim's return, the people joined in with their fears and misgivings. They began to weep needlessly. This unwarranted weeping became a basis for warranted weeping, as this night, the ninth of Av, became our national day of mourning. Tisha B'Av became the night of bechiah l'doros, weeping throughout the generations. All this could have been averted with a resounding negative response to the request for spies.

Horav Ovadiah Yosef, Shlita, offers a novel interpretation which sheds light on a number of ambiguities. Klal Yisrael received the Torah in the beginning of the month of Sivan. Moshe Rabbeinu ascended the mountain and returned forty days later, on the seventeenth of Tamuz. After being confronted by the flagrant debauchery and total breakdown of Jewish values and self-respect, Moshe shattered the Luchos and subsequently carried out the Heavenly-ordained punishment of the sinners. The next day, Moshe returned to the mountain for another forty days to pray on behalf of his errant nation. On the twenty-ninth of Av he returned, after Hashem had pardoned the nation. He was now instructed to prepare a second set of Luchos. So, on Rosh Chodesh Elul, he ascended the mountain once again, descending on Yom Kippur. Afterwards, the nation commenced the construction of the Mishkan, which was to serve as atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. The Mishkan was completed on the twenty-fifth of Kislev and concealed until Rosh Chodesh Nissan, which was the month during which Yitzchak Avinu was born. Since Yitzchak was willing to be sacrificed as per Hashem's command, the Mishkan, which was to be the place where Klal Yisrael would offer its sacrifices, was suitably connected with the Patriarch.

After all is said and done, from the time Klal Yisrael was liberated from Egypt until the incident of the meraglim, they had the opportunity to study Torah from Moshe for only five months. Imagine, if the nation were to go into the Holy Land at that point, it would be without having had the Torah instruction of the quintessential Rebbe of the Jewish People. Moshe was not entering the Land. So, who would teach them Torah? In addition, the first fourteen years would see them occupied in conquering and dividing up the Land. How would they retain Torah in such a manner that they would be able to transmit it in its pristine character, unadulterated and untainted, to the next generation? How could they guarantee the nitzchuyus, eternity, of the Torah?

Thus, Hashem "allowed" the meraglim to go their own way, to make mistakes, to deceive themselves, to create a scenario in which the nation would get carried away and descend to a nadir that was unpardonable. Now, they would be relegated to living out their days in the wilderness, in a setting where they would study Torah regularly from the mouth of Moshe. They would exist on Heavenly bread, manna, which the Talmud declares was the perfect sustenance for one who was to retain Torah. There was no bother in retrieving it, allowing them to study Torah unimpaired and undistracted. It was the perfect setting. It was a punishment that was really a blessing in disguise; but then, every punishment conceals a deeper meaning.

Every time something "bad" happens the first question we ask is: Why? We lay blame; we get bent out of shape; we grieve; we issue ultimatums. Do we ever take time out to analyze the situation, to ask ourselves: does Hashem really want to "hurt" us; does He not care? With the venerable Chacham's exegesis, we are able to apply a totally new perspective to some of the issues that have been plaguing us from time immemorial. If we would expend the same amount of effort in

attempting to "understand" Hashem's actions as we do "questioning" them, we might even arrive at fascinating conclusions. One does not have to be a student of history to begin to note and cogently arrive at logical conclusions to explain some of the more obvious "patterns" of history. Due to the sensitive nature of many of these issues, I will not elaborate, but ha'meivin yavin.

And Hashem said, "I have forgiven according to your words. (14:20)

Man does not understand his significance in the world scheme. Indeed, if we would realize what Hashem thinks of us, our self-portrait would change drastically and with that our actions - both positive and negative. While it is critical that one know his place, it is equally crucial that he not lose sight of his inherent potential. Having said this, the following statement made by Chazal in the Talmud Berachos (32) is quite uplifting. As a result of Klal Yisrael's reaction to the spies' slanderous report of Eretz Yisrael, Hashem wanted to wipe out the nation. He had no need for a people that could act in such a dreadful manner. Moshe Rabbeinu pled the nation's case before Hashem. "If You destroy Bnei Yisrael, the other nations of the world will denigrate Your strength. They will claim that You lacked the ability to follow through and conquer a land ruled by the 31 kings." Hashem acquiesced to Moshe's argument with the words, "Moshe, your words have given Me life" The Ran explains Hashem's ambiguous response. Hashem agreed with Moshe's logic and, as a result of Moshe's prayers, Hashem's power and greatness would continue to be known throughout the world.

This is an incredible statement which seems to credit Moshe with Hashem's Omnipotence finding acceptance in the eyes of all members of the human race. Did Moshe really deserve such an accolade? Clearly, Moshe did not have such superhuman ability. After all, all he really did was pray to Hashem to not take action against the people. To make such a compelling statement, and to attribute Moshe with giving Hashem "life", seems far-fetched.

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, cites Chazal who say that one who causes another fellow to sin is punished as if he himself were the perpetrator. Likewise, one who influences his friend to observe a mitzvah is rewarded as if he actually performed the mitzvah himself. With this in mind, the Rosh Yeshivah notes that Moshe's tefillos, prayers, were a defining factor in Hashem's decision to lead Klal Yisrael into the Holy Land, thereby revealing His supreme might to the world. Thus, Moshe is credited with giving Hashem "life," or - in an alternative formulation - eternal power and Omnipotence in the eyes of the world. While Moshe physically could not do this, spiritually it is reckoned in his favor.

Chazal teach us a powerful lesson. Man's power is incredible. He has within him the capacity for transforming the lives of others, for sustaining them both physically and spiritually. He can be mechayeh meisim, bring the "dead" back to life. In addition, any action that we undertake on behalf of our fellow - regardless of its "size", even a "simple" prayer that achieves only the maintenance of his status quo - is viewed as if it directly accomplished that benefit and all of the resulting spin-offs.

Someone is ill, and we are asked to participate in prayers on his behalf. What can "my" simple prayer add? What can it accomplish? That is exactly it: We do not know. Quite possibly, that "simple" prayer is what was needed to tip the scale. That simple act of kindness made the difference. It might be a minor effort on our part, but, for the recipient, it means his life. This is the power of our potential. There is, however, a flipside: a simple, improper action can effectively destroy a life, leaving us culpable for much misery and suffering. The decision remains in our hands. Such realization should motivate us to live up to our expected potential, bearing in mind that man is the crowning glory of Creation.

But my servant, Calev, because a different spirit was with him and he followed Me wholeheartedly. (14:24)

Three men were referred to as eved, servant, of Hashem: Avraham Avinu, Moshe Rabbeinu and Calev ben Yefuneh. One way to understand the commonality between them is that none of them ever referred to another human being with the title, "master." Aharon HaKohen and Yehoshua referred to Moshe as adoni Moshe, "my master, Moshe." David HaMelech referred to Shaul HaMelech as adoni. An eved Hashem has one Master: Hashem.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, translates eved as, "work subject to another's will," "directing energies to another's goal." Avraham Avinu's response to Hashem - Hineni, "Here I am," ready and willing to carry out anything that You ask of me - admits him into this august group. In describing Moshe in death, the Torah (Devarim 34:5) writes, "So Moshe, servant of Hashem, died there." Rabbeinu Bachya explains that Moshe is called a servant for the first time, alluding to a newer and higher status. Once the ingredient of his physical essence was removed from him, Moshe's soul was able to perceive much more.

Ibn Ezra suggests that only Calev - as opposed to Yehoshua - was called eved, because he quieted the nation. This begs elucidation. Clearly, Yehoshua was unparalleled in distinction. As successor to Moshe in leading the Jewish People, he

exemplified greatness in Torah, as well as leadership capabilities. Yet, he is not referred to as eved. He did not quiet down the nation. How do we explain this? An eved is unique in that he is the property of his master. A servant/slave has no independence, no identity other than being his master's possession, no legal status. He has no selfhood, living totally for his master. Moshe and Avraham exemplified this unique status, in that they lived solely and completely for Hashem.

When Calev arose before the entire nation and quieted them, he demonstrated a similar loyalty. We all care about public opinion. Everyone wants to be accepted, liked, respected. To swim against the tide of popular opinion takes courage and fortitude. To stand up to an entire nation, take control of the reins and quiet their grumbling, takes an individual who has abrogated his selfhood. It requires a person who lives for a higher ideal, whose goals and objectives supercede what people think of him. I think Rav Hirsch implies this in his commentary when he writes: "His faithful, fearless standing up for following G-d's behests made him worthy of the highest designation of a human working for G-d: eved Hashem." Calev reached the status for which many aspire, but never attain.

The ability to extirpate one's "self" and dedicate himself entirely to Hashem was a character trait that was transmitted by Calev to his descendants. We are taught that Betzalel, the architect of the Mishkan, was selected because he was the grandson of Chur, the one person who stood up to the erev rav, mixed multitude, the crazed rabble rousers, who initiated the Golden Calf. As a result of his stand, Chur was murdered in an act of defiance and mutiny. The Mishkan was to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf. How did Betzalel do it? How could he take part in building an edifice to atone for the flagrant murder of his grandfather?

It demanded much devotion to Hashem, total dedication to the Almighty, under such intense pressure that would tax the emotions of a lesser person. Betzalel disregarded his own feelings. He was totally subservient to Hashem. From where did he acquire such superhuman strength, such extreme devotion, such abrogation of self? It came from Chur's father: Calev ben Yefuneh. Yes, Betzalel inherited the family DNA of avdus, total subservience to Hashem. It is through such devotion that one achieves to make a Mishkan for Hashem. Vasu Li Mikdash, "And they shall make for Me a Sanctuary." To make a Sanctuary for Hashem, one must divest himself of all selfhood. Betzalel had the right ingredients for this mission.

In this wilderness shall your carcasses drop. (14:29)

Klal Yisrael's egregious reaction to the slander of the meraglim, spies, against Eretz Yisrael was not their first sin. They had sinned with the Golden Calf, a transgression that had undertones of idolatry. Yet, Hashem forgave the nation. They still retained the merit of continuing on to Eretz Yisrael. Not so, when they sinned with the meraglim. They did not receive a pass, regardless of their teshuvah, repentance. They had lost their opportunity to enter the Holy Land. Why? What distinguishes the sin of the meraglim from that of its predecessors? Why was this sin unpardonable?

The commentators, each in their own inimitable manner, respond to this question. I will cite two which teach us a deeper understanding of transgression and repentance. Horav Simcha Bunim, zl, m'Peshischa cites the two pesukim which express the people's teshuvah experience following each individual sin. The Torah describes Klal Yisrael's response upon hearing that Hashem was severing His relationship with the nation and relegating it to an angel: "The people heard this bad tidings and they became grief-stricken" (Shemos 33:4). About the time following the sin of the spies, the Torah writes, "and the people mourned exceedingly. (Bamidbar 14:39)" What is the difference between the two?

Teshuvah is a process through which one recognizes that he has grievously erred, an awareness that brings about a severe feeling of broken-hearted emptiness. Acknowledging that what has been done cannot be changed, the rift has been created, the mutiny against Hashem has been executed, he searches for a way to change the future. What is past is unalterable, but what about from here on in? Can he return? Will he be accepted? These questions gnaw at the baal teshuvah, penitent, as he alters his course of observance, seeking closer ties with the Almighty.

This was the spiritual plateau realized by Klal Yisrael following the sin of the Golden Calf. It was their first real infraction, and they were yet unaware of the Heavenly gift of teshuvah. They grieved and mourned over their terrible sin. No mention is made of their teshuvah, repentance, only of their grief. This is because they were unaware of the power of teshuvah. Their regret was sincere, their pain palpable. Hashem saw their broken hearts and forgave them. They had achieved the ultimate teshuvah without being aware of their groundbreaking inroads.

Following the sin of the meraglim, Klal Yisrael was acutely aware of the efficacy of teshuvah, its ability to mend, ameliorate and alter events past. They figured that they would repent - as they did before. If it had worked the previous time, why should it not work again? Regrettably, this indicated a taint in their teshuvah. They were doing it "again." It was missing a complete hisorerus, arousal. Thus, the Torah

writes that they "mourned exceedingly." It was not something new; they were just following "procedure." Teshuvah works when it is sincere.

Horav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, zl, focuses on the nature of the sin. Klal Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf. This incursion was against Hashem. Suddenly, they needed a medium to replace Moshe Rabbeinu who really was not a go-between. Hashem is a personal G-d, Who is accessible to everyone. Yet, they were forgiven. They sinned with the misonenim, when they complained about their lack of "food." This was the height of ingratitude, once again a sin directed at the Almighty. Here, again, Hashem forgave them. Later, Korach and his henchmen of distinguished leaders broke ranks with the people, attempting a mutiny against Moshe and Aharon. Here, too, they were forgiven. It was only the sin of the meraglim that carried with it an eternal taint of sin. Why?

Every aveirah, sin, warrants teshuvah, unless the sin is against Am Yisrael, the Jewish People. If one sins against his fellowman or if he sins against Hashem, he may repent and eventually be absolved of his sin. This is not true if he sins against the institution of Am Yisrael. This is an infraction for which there is no forgiveness - even if the sinner is sincerely remorseful and repentant. The iniquity is too severe. When the people declared, "Let us select a (new) leader who will return us to Egypt," they sinned against the People. Such a sin cannot be glossed over.

Rav Yitzchak Elchanan's explanation is compelling. We must ask ourselves for a definition of sin "against the people." There are situations in which individuals and groups have instigated movements which, at first, seem innocuous at best, and at their worst might be considered a sin against Hashem. Actually, these individuals were guilty of sinning against the nation. They undermined the collective Am Yisrael's ability to grow, to observe, to serve Hashem. These secularists talked a good talk, preaching change and innovation. In reality, they had made pawns out of unsuspecting, gullible Jews, manipulating their belief systems and turning them against Hashem. Such loathsome behavior is not susceptible to pardon.

by The Klahr Family (New York) In loving memory of our grandparents Phillip and Lillian Finger who were long-time friends and family of the Hebrew Academy. li"n R' Zalman Fishel ben Chanina Halevi a"h Maras Etsel Leah bas R' Yeshaya Halevi a"h t.n.tz.v.h.

From Rabbi Yissocher Frand ryfrand@torah.org & genesis@torah.org
To ravfrand@torah.org
Subject Rabbi Frand on Parsha

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Sh'lach

June is a popular month for weddings and I have had more than one person come over to me recently and ask, "Do you have a nice thought I can say over at a Sheva Brochos?" The following short thought from Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky is a nice idea to share at a Sheva Brochos.

In the beginning of Parshas Shlach, Moshe changed the name of Hoshea Bin Nun to Yehoshua [Bamidbar 13:16], saying (according to the Medrash) "May G-d save you from the counsel of the other spies" [Tanchuma 6; Sotah 34b]. Apparently, Moshe had a premonition that Yehoshua would need to stand up to the other Meraglim and therefore granted him this blessing.

Many ask why Moshe was only worried about Yehoshua. Why did Moshe not also feel it necessary to bless Kalev with extra fortitude to stand up to the bad counsel of the majority report of the other Meraglim [spies]? Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky gives the following very interesting answer. Kalev was married to Miriam, who was a righteous woman. Knowing that he had a righteous wife, Moshe was confident that Kalev would be safe from bad influences. Yehoshua, as far as we know, was not married at that time. He subsequently married Rachav haZonah. At this time, to the best of our knowledge, Yehoshua was still single. Since Yehoshua did not have a wife to back him up, it was he, rather than Kalev, who needed the blessing of "May G-d save you from the counsel of the spies".

If one needs to speak at a Sheva Brochos this month, let them take this thought and run with it (if the bride is worthy of this analogy).

"Yud-Hay" Will Save You from the Counsel of the Spies

Over the years, we have spent much time analyzing the exact aveyra [sin] of the Meraglim. The reason why there are so many opinions as to the nature of their aveyra is because it is very difficult to take at face value the simple reading of the Torah's narration, which implies that such great leaders of the Tribes of Israel acted so inappropriately. Our Sages tell us that each was a distinguished person and each was righteous. For them to have done a 180-degree reversal and question the Almighty's ability to take them into Eretz Yisrael is very difficult to explain.

We recently mentioned the opinion of the Zohar that the problem of the Meraglim was that they fell victim to the disease of "negius" [conflict of interest]. They were afraid that when they entered the Land of Israel, they would lose their respective positions of prominence. When people have a personal agenda, they fall prey to the phenomenon that "Bribes will blind those who have sight and pervert the words of the righteous" [Shmos 23:8]. The greatest and wisest amongst the judiciary can become influenced by personal attachment to the outcome of their own judgment. The Meraglim were afraid of the "new world order" that awaited them once they entered Israel, which would strip them of their leadership roles. Hence, their vision was skewed to the extent that what could have been interpreted in a completely positive fashion was given a negative and ominous "spin."

At this time, I would like to share an approach found in the Chidushei haRi"m, the Gerrer Rebbe, zt"l. The Chidushei haRi"m suggests that the problem the Meraglim had with going into Eretz Yisrael was due to the very fact that they were righteous individuals. Because they were Tzadikim, they loved and longed for the type of existence that they experienced in the Wilderness. This existence -- a completely spiritual life -- was unprecedented in the annals of humankind, before or since. Bread came down from Heaven daily. Their eating experience was completely spiritual. They did not need to worry about food, they did not need to worry about drink, and they did not need to worry about heat or air-conditioning. They literally had an "Olam haZeh" [this-worldly] experience that is similar to "Olam haBah" [the next world]. They knew that this type of intense and continuous spirituality would end once they entered Eretz Yisrael and began a more "normal" type of existence. "Vacation" would be over. It would be necessary to plow the land and sow the seeds, to fertilize, prune, harvest and to endure all the trials and tribulations of earning a living that have been plaguing us along with all of mankind ever since those miraculous 40 years of Wilderness experience.

The Meraglim, fearing the impending dramatic spiritual decline from the heavenly existence of the Wilderness era to the materialistic existence of having their own land, opted not to enter the land. The Chidushei HaRim compares it to the setup of his time in Eastern Europe, whereby a young couple would move in with the bride's family after marriage and the in-laws would support the children for the first few years of marriage while the son-in-law pursued his Torah studies. The young newlyweds did not need to worry about food, shelter, or making a living. The father-in-law took care of everything for X number of years; after that point, the father-in-law would tell the children "You're now on your own".

How did the son-in-law feel when the days of the father-in-law's promised support were counting down and the period of such untroubled existence was ending? Inevitably, there was trauma in the anticipated transition. The son-in-law needs to start worrying about food and shelter and health insurance and finding a job and the whole business.

The analogy in today's world is the bochrin [single young men] who go to learn in Yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael. They all love it. They have just one thing in their lives to worry about -- learning Torah, nothing else. They do not need to worry about college, they do not need to worry about grades, and they do not need to worry about shidduchim. Their father gives them a credit card and they just sit and learn with no worries in the world! What could be better?

They know that when they come back to America, they will start needing to worry about earning a living, finding a marriage partner, and about all the other challenges of "normal existence."

How does it feel when one has to "say good bye to the father-in-law?" How does it feel when one has to "come back to America?" Multiply that many times for these great righteous people who were living a 100% spiritual existence in the Wilderness. They knew that the minute they crossed the Jordan River, this "next-worldly" existence would be history.

That is why they did not want to go into Eretz Yisrael. Their reticence did not reflect a lack of "love of G-d" or "fear of G-d" or "faith in G-d". On the contrary, their attitude was "Who needs this "Olam haZeh"? Let us stay here. What could be better than our current situation?"

Where, then did they go wrong? The ultimate answer is that the Almighty does not want us to live that way. This is not the life of a Jew. The life of a Jew is to live a life where he has to worry about making a living and deal with all the physical requirements and needs of this world -- while at the same time remaining a holy person.

The Sefas Emes adds to what his grandfather the Chiddushei haRi"m wrote: This is why following the narrative of the Meraglim, the Torah gave us three mitzvos in Parshas Shlach. The three mitzvos are the mitzvah of Nessachim [wine libations on the altar, accompanying certain sacrifices], the mitzvah of Challah [separating a portion from our kneaded dough for the Kohen], and the mitzvah of Tzitzis [fringes worn on the corners of our four-cornered garments]. Why do these three mitzvos appear in this parsha?

The Sefas Emes writes that these 3 mitzvos stand in contrast to the philosophy of the Meraglim. The Meraglim held that the two worlds cannot be molded. "Olam haZeh" and "Olam haBah" -- never the twain shall meet. There is an eternal dichotomy and an unbridgeable chasm between spirituality (Ruchniyus) and physicality (gashmiyus). The Meraglim felt that you cannot have both, the Torah counters that you can have both and you MUST have both!

HaShem wants us to plant a vineyard, sit out in the hot sun, and sweat and worry about the grapes. "Will it be too hot or too cold; will there be bugs or birds that will consume my crop?" After we toil and sweat and break our back, HaShem wants you to take those grapes into which we invested our physical 'kishkas' and make them into wine and offer them on the holy Mizbayach. HaShem wants to show us that there are not two worlds. The end result of all those physical efforts is an act of sanctification of the produce of this world."

The same is true regarding the efforts needed to sow the seeds, grow the wheat, make the grain into flour, and then bake it into bread. All these physical efforts culminate in the mitzvah of the separation of Challah. We must transform the physicality of this world into spirituality and holiness.

The same is true regarding the raising of sheep, shearing of wool, spinning of yarn, and making of clothing. What can be further from spirituality than spending time with smelly sheep all day? Yet all those physical efforts culminate in placing fringes on the corners of our garments, such that we may look at what we have accomplished through our efforts "and remember thereby all the commandments of Hashem." This is the name of the game. This is what Judaism is all about. We are not like other religions who believe that we cannot bridge the worlds of spirituality and physicality.

The Kotzker Rebbe emphasized the first two words in the pasuk that begins, "Anshei Kodesh tiheyun Li" [Men of Holiness you shall be to Me - Shmos 22:30]. HaShem wants MEN of holiness, not just angels of holiness. G-d wants Man with all his evil inclinations and lusts and laziness. G-d desires to see such a creature become holy. Holy MEN, not holy angels!

To return to our point of departure, the Belzer Rebbe took note of Moshe's blessing to Yehoshua, upon changing the latter's name. He added the letter Yud to the start of the name, which now begins with the

letters Yud-Hay, as if to say "Yud-Hay (G-d) will save you from the counsel of the spies". Why, the Belzer Rebbe asked, did Moshe choose this specific name to save Yehoshua from evil counsel? Chazal tell us that the next world was created with the letter Yud and this world was created with the letter Hay. The next world is symbolized by the smallest of letters, suggesting that few people make it there, and this world is symbolized by a letter whose bottom is open -- suggesting that it is easy to fall out of this world.

The Meraglim felt that there was no synthesis between the "Yud" (the next world / spirituality) and the "Hay" (this world / physicality). Each one remains distinct and apart from the other. Moshe told Hoshea that the correct philosophy that would spare him from the erroneous opposite philosophy of the Meraglim is "Yud-Hay" -- the synthesis of this world and the next, the idea that the two worlds merge together in man's existence.

Achieving spirituality in a physical world is a difficult task. The Meraglim legitimately had what to fear, but that is how the Almighty wanted life to be. He put us here and made us physical beings but our life's work is to try to transform the mundane into the holy -- to take the wine and make it into Nesachim, to take the bread and make it into Challah, and to take the wool and to turn it into Tzitzis.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD
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Orthodox Union / www.ou.org
Rabbi Weinreb's Torah Column, Parshat Shelach
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
Person in the Parsha
Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h
History Repeats Itself

History repeats itself. I don't know the origin of that cliché, but I do know that our Sages held a similar point of view. "Ma'aseh avot siman labanim." What happened with ancestors is often a pattern that their descendants are destined to follow. The repetitive nature of historical processes seems to be true in the stories of all nations and cultures. This is why historians such as Arnold Toynbee believed that history is cyclical, and they have been able to demonstrate that certain central issues recur repetitively in the history of the human race.

I remember reading for example, in one of Toynbee's books, of how the lives of many world leaders are characterized by patterns of "withdrawal and return." Thus, for example, Moses went through a period of withdrawal in the desert of Midian and then returned to Egypt to lead his people out of slavery. Similarly, great figures in the history of Greece, of Rome, of medieval Europe, and of modern Western civilization endured periods of their lives when they were in prison or in other forms of voluntary or forced solitude, and were thus in a stage of "withdrawal." They then reemerged on the stage of leadership of their people, thereby entering a stage of "return".

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Shelach, a pattern is laid down which has been, tragically, repeated all too frequently in the history of our people. I speak of the pattern whereby a major portion of the Jewish leadership is opposed to entering the Land of Israel. Only a small and courageous minority says, "We should go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." (Numbers 13:30) This week, we read of the episodes of the spies. These men were a select group of talented and presumably pious individuals. They conducted their risky mission as it was assigned to them. They were to explore the Promised Land and determine the nature of its inhabitants and the nature of the terrain. This was, simply put, a preparation for entering the land, conquering it, and settling it once and for all. But 10 of the 12 returned totally discouraged. I would say, literally discouraged; that is, their courage was undone. They said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we."

This was only the first, but definitely not the last, time in Jewish history that Jewish leadership was internally torn apart by discord. The event described in this week's Torah portion is but the first precedent of a recurring pattern in which a few heroic

visionaries, Joshua and Caleb, can commit not only to enter the land themselves, but to inspire their followers to do so. But these visionaries, alas, are only part of the pattern. The other part are those leaders who are too cowardly, too cautious, or too blind to lead their people to do all that is necessary to enter and to possess the Holy Land.

During the Babylonian Exile, only unique individuals like Ezra and Nehemiah were made of the same stuff as Joshua and Caleb. And only a small remnant of the Babylonian Exile followed them and returned to the land. The great majority of Jews and the great majority of the Jewish leaders remained behind in Babylon, ignominiously.

So frequently over the ensuing centuries did history repeat itself. Every so often, a pitifully small group of Jews from Persia and Morocco, from France, from the bastions of Hasidism in the Ukraine or at the prodding of the Gaon of Vilna, follow the path advocated by Joshua and Caleb. Against all odds, they do return to the land. But the vast majority of their brethren, sometimes for practical reasons and sometimes for ideological ones, choose to remain behind in the Diaspora. They follow the path of the other ten spies.

Every portion in the Torah has relevance to contemporary Jewish life. This has been the theme of these columns which I have been writing now every week for over two years. But this week's Torah portion is especially timely.

We live in an age where the ideal of return to Zion, which, after all, is the ideal preached so inspiringly by Joshua and Caleb, is beset by challenges from all sides.

We live in an age where the liberal intellectual community, composed to a great extent of fellow Jews, no longer accepts the ideal of a Jewish homeland for the Jewish people. At the very least, that community is willing to see the Holy Land shared by another people. And there are those of that community who totally delegitimize the notion of a return to Zion.

More troubling to me however are those elements of the observant religious community who are antagonistic to the enterprise of the Jewish people living as a sovereign nation in the land promised to us by the Almighty himself. I know full well that there are legitimate ideological views for or against religious Zionism, and I am certainly cognizant of the faults and flaws of the government of the State of Israel.

But I fail to see how anyone reading this week's Torah portion cannot be impressed by its central messages: We left Egypt with a promise to inherit a specific land flowing with milk and honey. We had the opportunity to enter that land very soon after the Exodus. We failed to appreciate the opportunity and we lost it. True, we didn't lose it entirely, and it was only postponed for forty years; the blink of an eye from the perspective of the millennia of Jewish history.

The tragedy of Parshat Shelach transcends this one incident described there. Rather, the narrative of Parshat Shelach establishes a pattern which is repeated too often during our subsequent history: The conflict between foresight and fear, between courage and cowardice, between true faith and weaker faith, becomes an eternal theme in our history down to this very day.

I have come to learn, via the communications I receive from so many of you, dear readers, that you all listen quite attentively to each week's Torah portion. I challenge you, especially this week, to listen attentively to the narrative of the spies. And when it is over, I am quite confident that you will see the message it sends to our generation. It is the message of Joshua and Caleb. It is the message that says to the entire congregation of the children of Israel:

"The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delight in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it unto us – a land which flows with milk and honey. Only rebel not against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us; their defense is removed from over them, and the Lord is with us; fear them not." (Numbers 14:7-9)

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A Thought for the Week with Rabbi Jay Kelman

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Parshat Shelach Lecha - Right People: Wrong Mission

Having the right people for the wrong job can lead to tragic consequences. Such was the fate of the meraglim. Twelve handpicked leaders, who represented the best of the Jewish people had to offer, were to serve as the final link between Egyptian slavery and Israeli redemption. Yet something went terribly wrong.

In the forty days they spent on their mission these great leaders sowed the seeds of despair, pain and punishment. Yet it is not at all clear what exactly they did wrong. Should the meraglim not have told the people how difficult conquering the land

might be? Some have argued that their mistake was in issuing an editorial opinion rather than just reporting the objective facts. But do we not expect our leaders to interpret and lead and not just report? That they were chosen for their mission in the first place clearly indicates that once the Jewish people would enter the land they could no longer rely on overt miracles to sustain them. In such an environment honest appraisals of the challenges ahead are most necessary.

The Malbim (13:2) notes that there are two types of "spies", each with a distinct mission, and we mix the two at our own peril. The first type is quite common today among those who have decided to make, or are just contemplating making aliyah. One goes on a pilot trip to check out job prospects, educational opportunities, suitable housing, and so forth. For such a mission one enters the country with much fanfare, trying to gather as much information as possible, speaking to as many people as one can, from all walks of life. The more people who can join the pilot mission the more likely one is to reap the benefits. One is seeking the strengths of the land as one prepares to immigrate.

The second type is the military spy sent secretly to search for ways to conquer a land, to find the weaknesses of the land and thereby exploit them. One seeks to avoid the people at all costs and one sends as small a contingent as possible. The tragedy of the meraglim is that they mixed up these very different missions. They were sent *latoor et haaretz*, to tour the land, to seek the beauty of the land and come back reenergized for the mission at hand. Nowhere in this story does the Torah refer to them as meraglim, military spies. Moshe's instructions were related to such issues as the environment, "see the land"; health, "are they strong or weak"; and agriculture, "is the soil rich or weak". Moshe picked great spiritual leaders, not military men, to lead the mission. Each tribe sent its own named representative as each of the tribes sought different qualities in the land they were to settle.

It was Yehoshua, forty years later, who sent two unnamed meraglim, military spies "*lachfor et haaretz*" to "dig the land", and to gather intelligence for the upcoming conquest. Tragically those chosen "*latoor*", to seek the beauty of the land became meraglim reporting on the military challenges ahead. As important as the sending of meraglim may be, this group of religious leaders was ill-suited for the task at hand.

Conquering the land of Israel, both spiritually and physically, requires excellence in many areas. Technical prowess, military might, economic stability, moral leadership, and on and on the list goes. Each Jew and each Jewish group has something to contribute. But we must know the areas of our strengths and weaknesses; where we can make a positive impact and where our involvement will have negative repercussions. Religious leaders must display moral leadership while it is the job of the military leaders to defend the land. We mix the two at our peril. May we merit to be able "*latoor et haaretz*", to see the beauty of the land free from any need for meraglim.

Rabbi Kelman, in addition to his founder and leadership roles in Torah in Motion, teaches Ethics, Talmud and Rabbinics at the Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto.

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Weekly Halacha by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Serving Hot Food on Shabbos

Serving food on Shabbos has its own set of rules of what may or may not be permitted. The following is a short review of some relevant halachos that apply to serving food on Shabbos:

When the food or water is still in a pot:

* If, for any reason, the pot cover was removed from the pot while the pot is on the heat source, it is forbidden to replace the cover on the pot unless it is clear that the food inside is completely cooked.

* It is permitted to lift off the lid of an urn and replace it, as long as the water inside was previously boiled – even if it is not boiling at the time that the lid is being removed and replaced. It is also permitted to dish out water from an urn.

* It is forbidden to stir hot food in a pot which is on the fire or blech, even if the food is completely cooked. It is also forbidden to stir hot food in a pot which has been removed from the fire or blech, but only if the food is not completely cooked.

* It is forbidden to dish out food from a pot which is directly on a flame, whether the food is completely cooked or not. Even if the pot is too heavy to pick up and remove from the fire, it is still prohibited to dish out food from it.

* It is forbidden to place a cold, wet ladle [either from tap water or from previously ladled soup which accumulated and got cold in the ladle] into a pot of hot soup, even if the pot is presently not on the fire or blech.

* Cooked noodles may be added directly into the pot of soup, if the pot is removed from its heat source.

* It is forbidden to pour hot water from the urn directly into a cup containing a teabag, cocoa or chocolate milk. It is forbidden to place a tea bag into a cup of hot water, or to pour hot water from a cup over a tea bag. Most poskim also strongly advise not to pour hot water from the urn directly into a cup containing instant tea, coffee or cocoa.

* It is permitted to pour hot water from an urn into a thermos bottle, even though the water will become "insulated" and retain its heat in the thermos bottle.

Note: It is strongly advised not to add sugar or salt to a pot of hot liquid even after it has been removed from the heat source. It is permitted, however, to add sugar or salt or any pre-cooked seasoning to solid food, e.g., a hot potato once it was removed from the heat source.

When the food or water is already served in a plate, bowl or cup:

* It is permitted to pour lemon juice, which is generally cooked before processing, into a cup of hot tea. But it is forbidden to place a slice of lemon into a cup of hot tea.

* It is permitted to add sugar to the tea or salt (or any other previously cooked spice) to the soup.

* It is permitted to add soup croutons or cooked noodles to a bowl of hot soup.

* It is permitted to place an ice cube or cold water into a bowl of hot soup.

* It is permitted to place an ice cube or cold water into a cup of hot tea. If, however, the tea is scalding [approx. 150°F], some poskim prohibit doing so and it should be avoided.

* It is permitted to dip challah into hot soup, but it is forbidden to dip a piece of cake or a cookie into hot tea or coffee.

* It is permitted to pour ketchup, mustard or mayonnaise over any hot food served on a plate.

* It is permitted to pour cold gravy (or cold soup) on any hot food served on a plate. Some poskim hold that unless the gravy is still warm, it should not be poured over a hot solid food (davar gush).

* Eat hot cholent, whether it is soupy or lumpy, together with cold cuts or other pieces of cooked, cold meat.

* It is forbidden to place a pickle, or any other uncooked food item, on top of or underneath a hot solid food (davar gush).

* It is forbidden to add raw spices (e.g., pepper, garlic) to a davar gush.

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

A Woman's Guide to Tzitzis **By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

The Torn Hole

Question # 1

Mrs. Friedman wants to know:

"The small hole on my son's talis koton in which the tzitzis strings were inserted is torn. Does this invalidate Yanki's tzitzis?"

The Unraveled Knot

Question #2

Mrs. Weiss notices that the knots on her son's tzitzis have untied. Are his tzitzis still kosher?

A Bicycle Casualty

Question #3, from Mrs. Goldberg:

"My son's tzitzis got caught in his bicycle and several strings became torn. Are the tzitzis invalid?"

The Woman's Tzitzis Guide

Why write a woman's guide to tzitzis, when women are not required to observe the mitzvah, and, according to many authorities, are not even permitted to wear them? (See Targum Yonasan to Devarim 22:5, that a woman wearing tzitzis violates the prohibition of wearing a man's garment.) In addition, some authorities contend that because women are exempt from fulfilling the mitzvah, they should not attach the tzitzis strings onto the garment (Rama, Orach Chayim 14:1 and commentaries). (The Rama concludes that if a woman did attach the tzitzis onto the garment the tzitzis are kosher.)

The reason for this guide is that women are often responsible for the purchase, upkeep, and laundering of the tzitzis of their boys and men. Indeed, women often ask me questions relevant to these halachos. Men will also find this guide very useful.

In order to answer the above questions thoroughly, we must first understand some basics about how tzitzis are produced.

Please note that throughout this article, "tzitzis" refers to the strings placed on the corners of the garment; the garment itself will be called either a "talis koton" or a "talis."

Special Strings

Tzitzis are not manufactured from ordinary thread, but only from thread manufactured specifically to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzis. In a different article, I discussed the basics of this requirement.

Inserting the Tzitzis

One takes four of these specially lishmah-made strings and inserts them through a hole in the corner of the garment in order to fulfill the verse's requirement that the tzitzis threads lie over the corner of the garment. The hole must be not so distant from the corner that the tzitzis are considered to be hanging from the main part of the garment (rather than on the corner), and yet not so close that the tzitzis hang completely below the garment (Menachos 42a; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 11:9). Similarly, when the tzitzis are later attached to the garment, it should be done in a way that the upper part of the tzitzis rests on the garment.

Where Should the Hole Be?

The Gemara explains that the hole through which the tzitzis are placed should be closer to the corner than "three fingerwidths," which means three times the width of a finger. Whose finger and which finger?

Most poskim conclude that a fingerwidth is the width of an average-sized man's thumb at its widest point.

Measure this distance, multiply it by three, and you have "three fingerwidths."

Now, measure three fingerwidths from the two sides of the garment near the corner (not from the actual right-angle corner of the garment) and you can create a square in the corner of the garment (Rama, Orach Chayim 11:9). If the tzitzis are attached beyond this area, they are not considered to be on the corner. Although there is a range of opinion as to exactly how much area this is, most poskim conclude that it is about six centimeters, or about 2 1/2 inches, from each side.

Others follow a different interpretation of which finger is used to measure this distance, and according to their opinion, the area is a bit smaller (Artzos Hachayim; Mishnah Berurah 11:42).

Closest Hole

The closest the hole should be made is no nearer to the sides of the talis or talis koton than the distance from the end of the thumb nail to the thumb joint, measured by the thumb of an average-sized man. (This measures less than two centimeters or less than .75 inches.) If the hole is made closer than this, the tzitzis are not kosher because the tzitzis strings will hang below the garment and, as I explained above, they are required to be resting partly on the garment itself. However, if one inserted and knotted the tzitzis threads in a hole that was at the time in the correct place, and then subsequently the garment shrunk or was shortened, or the hole tore, resulting in the tzitzis being closer to the corner than they should, the tzitzis are nonetheless kosher (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 11:10).

To sum up:

To determine where the hole should be, one can examine the corner of the talis or talis koton and mark inward from the two adjacent sides that form the corner.

Within two centimeters of either side is too close to the edge of the garment to attach the tzitzis, and more than six centimeters is too far.

Jewish Labor

The person attaching the strings to the garment must be Jewish (Menachos 42a; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 14:1). There was a major scandal a few years ago when unscrupulous or unknowledgeable manufacturers were discovered to have hired non-Jews to make tzitzis. Hopefully, this problem has been resolved, but one should check that the tzitzis have a reliable hechsher. Based on shaylos I have been asked, I have discovered many people are unaware that children's talisim kotonim must also be reliably kosher.

Yes, Mrs. Friedman

Although we have not finished our description of tzitzis production, we have sufficient information to discuss Mrs. Friedman's question. The hole (through which the tzitzis strings are placed) tore, and, as a result, the tzitzis are now closer to the corner of the garment than they should be. Does this invalidate the tzitzis? Since the tzitzis strings were originally inserted into a hole that was correctly located, the tzitzis remain kosher.

I advised Mrs. Friedman to mend and reinforce the garment before it tears so badly that the tzitzis strings fall off, which will invalidate the garment, requiring sewing the clothing and undoing and restringing the tzitzis again to make it kosher.

Four in One

Let us now return to tzitzis production. After making the hole in its correct place, one takes four tzitzis strings that have been spun and twisted lishmah. Three of the threads are the same length, but one of the strings is much longer than the others since it will be the string that is coiled around the others. When the process of coiling the tzitzis string is completed, the eight free-hanging strings should be about the same length.

The strings should be long enough that when they are completely coiled and tied (as I will describe) the free-hanging eight strings should be the length of eight fingerwidths (as described above), which is about 16–20 centimeters or about eight inches.

The Torah requires that there be exactly four tzitzis strings used. Using fewer or more strings invalidates the mitzvah and, according to some opinions, violates the Torah prohibitions of bal tosfif or bal tigrá, adding to or detracting from a Torah commandment (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 11:12 and commentaries).

Pulling Strings

At this point, one pulls the four strings through the hole in the talis or talis koton until the three shorter strings are halfway through the hole. The longer string should be pulled through so that on one side it is the same length as the other strings, but the other side is much longer, since this extra length will be wrapped around the other strings.

After the four strings are threaded through the garment, there will be eight strings hanging off the garment. One then loops together the ends of the four strings from the side that does not include the long string so that through the entire subsequent coiling and knotting one can identify that these are from four different original strings. We will soon see why we perform this step (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 12:1).

One then takes the four looped together strings and ties them around the other four strings in a secure, tight double knot. This permanent knot is Torah-required.

Then one takes the longer string and coils it around the seven others and then the two sets of four strings are knotted tightly. The coiled tzitzis strings are called the gedil.

The accepted custom is to tie the eight strings together in five different places, each separated by an area where the long string is coiled around the others several times. Remember the Mitzvos!

The five knots help us remember all the mitzvos. As Rashi writes, the gematriya (numerical value) of the word tzitzis (when spelled with the letter yud twice) equals 600, which when one adds eight for the eight hanging tzitzis strings and five for the five knots that tie them, adds up to 613. Additionally, the five knots remind us of the Torah's five chumashim.

The Torah itself did not require all these coilings and knots, but required only one knot and one coiled area. The other knots and coilings are only lichatchilah, the proper way to make the tzitzis. However, if one failed to make these coilings or knots, the tzitzis are nevertheless kosher, provided there is at least one coiled gedil area and at least one knot.

Similarly, if the coiling unravels in the middle -- not an uncommon occurrence -- the tzitzis are still fully kosher, as long as one gedil area remains.

This will help answer Mrs. Weiss's question about some of her son's tzitzis knots being untied. As long as one knot remains, and there is some area where the tzitzis strings are coiled together, the tzitzis are still kosher. Of course, one should re-wind the longer tzitzis string around the others and retie the knots, but in the interim the tzitzis are kosher.

As I mentioned above, it is preferable that women not be the ones who insert the tzitzis strings onto the garment and tie them since women are absolved from fulfilling this mitzvah (Rama, Orach Chayim 14:1 and commentaries).

How Many Coils?

The number of coils between the knots is a matter of custom. (Based on the Arizal's tradition, common practice is to coil the thread seven times between the first two knots, eight between the next two, eleven between the third and fourth, and thirteen times between the fourth and fifth knots.)

To recap, we twist the longer string around the others and tie the tzitzis strings into knots in a way that creates five knots and between them four areas of tightly coiled string that resemble a cable. Torah law only requires that we tie one knot and that there be some area of coiled string.

Hang Loose!

After completing the coiling and tying, the rest of the strings are allowed to hang freely. The free-hanging strings are referred to as the "pesil." As I mentioned above, when making the tzitzis, the pesil should be at least eight fingerwidths long, which is about eight inches (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 11:14). However, if the strings become torn afterward, the tzitzis are still kosher even if only a very small amount of pesil remains -- long enough to make a loop and knot it, which is probably about an inch (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 12:1).

Tear Near the Top

If the tzitzis strings become torn above the first knot, the tzitzis are invalid. This is for the following reason:

As I explained, tzitzis are made from four strings inserted into the garment, and then knotted and coiled. The Torah requires that each of these four strings be attached and hang from the corner of the garment and be included both in the gedil, the coiled part, and the pesil, the loose, hanging strings.

If the thread tore at the top, then it is no longer hanging from the corner of the garment, but held in place by the other threads. Similarly, if the string tore in a way that it has no pesil, the tzitzis are invalid.

Torn String

We can now explain whether tzitzis become invalid when the tzitzis strings become torn, which is a matter of where the strings tore. If only one of the eight strings tore and only below the first knot, then the tzitzis are still kosher. This is because all four of the original tzitzis still have both gedil, the coiled part, and pesil, the hanging part.

If two of the eight strings tore at a point that there is no pesil anymore, then whether the tzitzis are still kosher depends on whether these were part of the same original tzitzis string or not. If they were two sides of the same original tzitzis string, then the tzitzis are invalid because one of the four original strings now lacks pesil. This is the reason why one should be careful to loop four of the strings together before beginning the coiling and knotting, since this helps keep track when two or more strings tear, whether they are the two parts of the same string, which will invalidate the tzitzis if no pesil remains, or parts of two different strings, in which case the tzitzis are kosher if the other end of the string still has pesil.

If a tear takes place somewhere between the first knot and the pesil, the remaining part of that string is halachically nonexistent since it no longer hangs from the garment, but is being kept in place by the coiling and knotting. Thus, if this happens to only one string of the eight, the tzitzis are still kosher because all four original tzitzis still have some pesil. However, if this happens to two or more strings, one must be concerned that it was two sides of the same original string and the tzitzis may now be invalid because only three of the original strings now have pesil.

Conclusion

Rav Hirsch notes that the root of the word tzitzis is "sprout" or "blossom," a strange concept to associate with garments, which do not grow. He explains that the message of our clothing is extended, that is, sprouts and blossoms, by virtue of our tzitzis.

The introduction of clothing to Adam and Chavah was to teach man that his destiny is greater than an animal's, and that his responsibility is to make all his decisions according to Hashem's laws, and not his own desires. Introducing tzitzis onto a Jew's garments reinforce this idea; we must act according to what Hashem expects. Thus, whether we are wearing, shopping for, examining, or laundering tzitzis, we must remember our life's goal: fulfilling Hashem's instructions, not our own desires.

*All names have been changed.

**All measurements in this article are approximate. One should check with a Rav for exact figures.