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In memory of **Chaim Yissachar z"l** ben Yecheil Zaydel Dov

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The Sin of the Meraglim

Adopted and translated by CS from **Nechama Leibowitz Iyunim B'Sefer Bamidbar**

The Mission Was Permitted But Not Ideal

The parsha of the meraglim begins: שלח לך אנשים Send for yourself men (Bamidbar 13:2). Rashi, based on Chazal, explains: שלח לך לך Send for yourself, according to your understanding. I am not commanding you. If you wish, send. This already shows that sending the meraglim was not the highest level. Klal Yisrael had lived with open hashgachah in the midbar. They were surrounded by the Ananei Hakavod, fed by the manna, and guided by Hashem. Ideally, they should have entered Eretz Yisrael with complete trust in Hashem's promise, without first testing whether the promise seemed realistic.

But Nechama Leibowitz emphasizes an important nuance. The request to send meraglim was not automatically wicked. A person is not always expected to live on the highest possible level of bitachon.

There is room for hishtadlus, for normal human effort and preparation. Chazal say: בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך בה מוליכין אותו In the way a person wants to go, he is led. If Klal Yisrael wanted to enter the land through the natural path of scouts and investigation, Hashem allowed that path. It was not commanded, but it was permitted. The problem was not the act of sending messengers. The problem was what the messengers did with their mission.

A Mission to Report Not to Decide

Moshe gave the meraglim specific questions. He did not ask them whether Klal Yisrael should enter Eretz Yisrael. He did not ask them whether Hashem's promise could be fulfilled. He asked them to gather information.

The Torah says: וראיתם את הארץ מה היא ואת העם הישב עליה החזק הוא רב רב ומה הארץ אשר הוא ישב בה הטובה היא אם רעה ומה הארץ אשר הוא ישב בה הטובה היא אם רעה And what is the land in which they dwell, is it good or bad, and what are the cities in which they dwell, are they open camps or fortified cities (13:18). He then added: ומה הארץ השמנה היא אם רזה היש בה עץ אם אין And what is the land, is it fat or lean, is there a tree in it or not (13:20).

Nechama carefully organizes these questions. Moshe asked about the people: החזק הוא רב Are they strong or weak, and המעט הוא אם רב Are they few or many. He asked about the land as a place to live: הטובה היא אם רעה Is it good or bad. He asked about the cities from the standpoint of conquest: הבמחנים אם במבצרים Are they open camps or fortified cities. He asked about the agricultural quality of the land: השמנה היא אם רזה Is it fat or lean, and היש בה עץ אם אין Is there a tree or not.

This structure matters because the first report of the meraglim seems to answer Moshe's questions. They say: באנו אל הארץ אשר שלחנתנו וגם זבת חלב ודבש היא וזה פריה We came to the land to which you sent us, and it indeed flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit (13:27). They begin with praise. The land is good. It is flowing with milk and honey. They even bring fruit as proof.

Until this point, they seem to be doing what they were sent to do.

The Dangerous Word אפס

Then their tone changes: אפס כי עז העם הישב בארץ והערים בצרות גדולתן However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are very greatly fortified, and we also saw the children of the giant there (13:28).

The key word is אפס, however. It does not merely introduce another fact. It changes the meaning of the facts that came before. It is as if they are saying: yes, the land is good, yes, it flows with milk and honey, yes, the fruit is impressive, but none of that matters because the people are too strong and the cities are too fortified.

Here the sin begins to appear. The meraglim have not yet said openly, "Do not go." But their words are no longer neutral. They are beginning to frame the facts in a way that weakens the people.

This is the Ramban's sharp question. What did the meraglim do wrong? Moshe himself had asked whether the people were strong or weak. They answered that the people were strong. Moshe had asked whether the cities were open or fortified. They answered that the cities were fortified. If so, why were they blamed?

The Ramban (13:2) asks: מה עשו המרגלים כי משה אמר להם וראיתם את הארץ מה היא ואת העם הישב עליה החזק הוא הרפה What did the meraglim

do wrong, since Moshe said to them: see what the land is, and the people who dwell in it, whether they are strong or weak?

The answer is that they were not punished for reporting facts. They were punished for using those facts to create despair. Moshe asked for information that would help the nation prepare to enter the land. They gave information in a way that made the people afraid to enter.

Witnesses Who Became Advisors

The Akeidas Yitzchak (Rav Yitzchak Arama 1420–1494), explains this with a mashal. A person sends a messenger to inspect merchandise. The messenger is asked to report whether the merchandise is good or bad, strong or weak, expensive or cheap. If the messenger returns and says, “It is good, but the price is too high, and therefore you should not buy it,” he has gone beyond his role. He was sent to report, not to decide.

So too, the meraglim were sent to describe Eretz Yisrael. They were not appointed to decide whether Hashem’s promise should be trusted. Their job was testimony, not policy. They were witnesses, not advisors.

This explains why Calev reacts immediately: **ויהם כלב את העם אל משה** ויהם כלב את העם אל משה ויאמר עלה נעלה וירשנו אתה כי יכול נוכל לה toward Moshe and said: we shall surely go up and inherit it, for we can surely do it (13:30).

Calev does not deny the facts. He does not say the people are weak. He does not say the cities are open. He hears the conclusion hidden inside the word **אפס**. He understands that the meraglim are using danger to weaken emunah. Therefore, he answers not with a new report, but with confidence: **עלה נעלה** We shall surely go up.

From לא נוכל to אפס

Only after Calev speaks do the meraglim say openly what had been hidden before: **לא נוכל לעלות אל העם כי חזק הוא ממנו** We cannot go up against the people, for they are stronger than us (13:31).

This is the second stage. Now they are no longer merely reporting. They are issuing a decision: **לא נוכל** We cannot. But this was never their assignment. They were asked what the land was like. They were not asked whether Hashem could bring them into it.

Chazal read the words **ממנו הוא חזק** in a deeper way. The simple meaning is, they are stronger than we are. But Chazal explain: **הזק הוא** הזק הוא הטיחו דברים כלפי מעלה – ממנו As if they were saying, chas v’shalom, that the nations were stronger than Hashem. (Bamidbar Raba 16;11) The Midrash is uncovering the implicit meaning of their words. Once they said **לא נוכל**, we cannot, they were no longer speaking only about military strength. If Hashem had promised the land, then saying “we cannot” meant that they were measuring the nations against Hashem’s promise and deciding that the nations were stronger.

The meraglim judged the situation only by the natural order. Naturally, they may have been right. A nation of former slaves in the midbar could not easily conquer fortified cities and powerful nations. But Klal Yisrael was not entering Eretz Yisrael as an ordinary nation relying only on ordinary strength. They were entering with Hashem’s promise. Their mistake was that they treated the natural obstacle as the final word.

When Truth Becomes דיבה

The third stage is the worst: **ויוציאו דבת הארץ אשר תרו אתה אל בני ישראל** They brought out an evil report about the land that they had spied out to Bnei Yisrael (13:32).

The audience has now changed. At first, they reported to Moshe and Aharon. Now they speak **אל בני ישראל**, to the people. Their words become a public campaign of fear.

They say: **הארץ אשר עברנו בה לתור אתה ארץ אכלת יושביה היא** The land through which we passed to spy it out is a land that consumes its inhabitants (13:32). This is very different from Moshe’s question. Moshe asked: **הטובה היא אם רעה** Is it good or bad. At first, they answered: **זבת חלב ודבש היא** It flows with milk and honey. Now the same land becomes **ארץ אכלת יושביה**, a land that consumes its inhabitants.

Here Nechama adds another important nuance. **דיבה** does not always mean that every word is a complete lie. The Akeidas Yitzchak explains that even **ארץ אכלת יושביה** may have been based on something they saw. They may have meant that the land was harsh and intense, so only very powerful people survived there. In that sense, the land “consumed” weaker inhabitants and left only the strong.

But that itself is the danger. A partial truth, when used to frighten and discourage, becomes **דיבה**. The meraglim may have seen real things, but they interpreted them in the darkest way and used them to weaken the people’s trust in Hashem.

This also explains Chazal’s rule: **כל לשון הרע שאין בו דבר אמת בתחלתו** כל לשון הרע שאין בו דבר אמת בתחלתו Any lashon hara that does not contain some truth at the beginning will not last in the end. The power of the meraglim’s words came from the fact that they began with truth. The land really had impressive fruit. The people really were strong. The cities really were fortified. But because the report contained truth, the false conclusion became more convincing.

They continue: **ונהי בעינינו כחגבים וכן היינו בעיניהם** We were in our own eyes like grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes (13:33). The first collapse was internal. **ונהי בעינינו** We were in our own eyes. Before the inhabitants saw them as small, they saw themselves as small. Fear changed how they saw the world because it first changed how they saw themselves.

The Answer of Yehoshua and Calev

Yehoshua and Calev answer with a completely different way of seeing: **טובה הארץ מאד מאד** The land is very, very good (14:7). They do not deny the danger. They do not deny that the people are strong or that the cities are fortified. But they refuse to let those facts define reality.

They say: **אם חפץ בנו ה' והביא אתנו אל הארץ הזאת ונתנה לנו ארץ אשר היא זבת חלב ודבש** If Hashem desires us, He will bring us to this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey (14:8). The real question is not whether there are dangers. The real question is whether Hashem is with them.

They continue: **אל תמרדו ואתם אל תיראו את עם הארץ** But do not rebel against Hashem, and do not fear the people of the land (14:9). This is a crucial phrase. Fear becomes rebellion when it denies Hashem’s promise. A person may see danger and still have emunah. A person may plan, prepare, and take precautions. But when danger becomes a reason to reject Hashem’s word, fear has become **מרידה**. Then Yehoshua and Calev say: **אל תיראו** For they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and Hashem is with us, do not fear them (14:9).

This is the perfect answer to the meraglim. The meraglim said: **ארץ אכלת יושביה היא** The land consumes its inhabitants. Yehoshua and Calev answered: **כי לחמנו הם** They are our bread. The meraglim

described the land as something that eats people. Yehoshua and Calev described the nations as something that would be eaten, meaning they would be overcome easily with Hashem's help. Same land. Same facts. Opposite emunah.

The Crying for Generations

The people accepted the fear of the meraglim. The Torah says: ותשא כל העדה ויתנו את קולם ויבכו העם בלילה ההוא אתם בכיתם בכיה של חנם ואני קובע לכם בכיה (14:1). Chazal say that Hashem told them: You cried a crying for nothing, and I will establish for you crying for generations.

Their crying was not ordinary sadness. It was a rejection of Hashem's goodness. They cried as if the land Hashem promised was a tragedy rather than a gift. They turned Eretz Yisrael from זבת חלב ודבש into ארץ אכלת יושביה, from a land flowing with blessing into a land of danger and fear.

The Lesson

The sin of the meraglim did not begin with an obvious denial of Hashem. It began with reasonable-sounding facts. It began with practical concerns. It began with reports that seemed to answer Moshe's questions.

But then came אפס, however. Then came לא נוכל, we cannot. Then came ארץ אכלת יושביה, a land that consumes its inhabitants. Step by step, facts became fear, fear became despair, and despair became rebellion.

The lesson is not that a person should ignore reality. Moshe himself asked about the people, the cities, the land, and the produce. Torah does not demand blindness. But Torah demands that facts be seen inside the larger truth of Hashem's promise.

Hishtadlus asks: what must we do to fulfill Hashem's will? Fear asks: can Hashem really fulfill His word? The meraglim crossed that line. They used human investigation not to prepare for the promise, but to undermine it.

Calev's words remain the answer to the whole episode: עלה נעלה וירשנו אתה כי יכול נוכל לה We shall surely go up and inherit it, for we can surely do it. He was not saying there were no dangers. He was saying that danger is not the final word. Hashem's promise is the final word.

The meraglim were sent to see Eretz Yisrael. They saw its fruit, its cities, its people, and its giants. But they did not see it as the land promised by Hashem. Yehoshua and Calev saw the same land and reached the opposite conclusion: טובה הארץ מאד מאד The land is very, very good. The difference was not in the facts they saw, but in how they saw them. The meraglim saw through fear and despair. Yehoshua and Calev saw through emunah.

Shlach – The Danger of a Crooked Beginning

Adapted by cs from **Aleinu LiShabeach by Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein**

The Danger of Giving Oneself Room to Be Mistaken

The Torah begins the parsha with Hashem's words to Moshe Rabbeinu, שלח לך אנשים, send for yourself men. Rashi explains that Hashem was not commanding Moshe to send the meraglim. Rather, He was allowing it. Rashi adds the sharp words of Chazal: אני אמרתי להם שהיא טובה חייהם שאני נותן להם מקום לטעות *I told them that the land is good; by their lives, I will give them room to make a mistake.*

This teaches a frightening rule in avodas Hashem. When a person goes against the will of Hashem, ניתנת הרשות ללשונו להטעותו ולסמא, permission is given to his own tongue to mislead him and blind his eyes. The danger is not only that he does something wrong. The deeper danger is that after he begins in the wrong place, his own arguments begin to sound convincing. What should have been clear becomes doubtful. What should have been impossible to justify begins to sound reasonable.

This was the beginning of the chet hameraglim. Hashem had already told them that Eretz Yisrael was טובה, good. There was no real doubt to resolve. But once they insisted on examining the land on their own terms, they were given מקום לטעות, room to err. They entered a trap in which their own words and reasoning would make the mistake look correct.

The Thief Who Davens While Stealing

The Gemara describes גנבא אפום מחרתא רחמנא קריא *a thief at the mouth of the tunnel calls out to Hashem*. The thief is about to commit a crime, yet he davens to Hashem for success. He may not even be pretending. He may truly ask Hashem to help him enter safely, steal successfully, and return home in peace.

But that itself shows how far a person can fall. He does not notice the contradiction. He is asking Hashem to help him commit an aveirah. His religious language does not prove that his heart is straight. It may be part of the confusion. Once a person stands inside an aveirah, even his tefillah can become twisted.

So too with the meraglim. Their words sounded practical and serious. They spoke about roads, cities, strong nations, giants, danger, and military reality. Later, the argument even took on the language of pikuach nefesh. But the whole discussion began from the wrong place. Hashem had promised the land. Once they stepped away from that emunah, their own reasoning began to hide the truth from them.

How Could the Nation Want to Stone Yehoshua and Calev

The pasuk says, ותאמר כל העדה לרגום אותם באבנים, the whole assembly said to stone Yehoshua and Calev. This is shocking. How could the nation fall so far that they were ready to kill the very tzaddikim who were speaking the truth?

This was not a simple mob of empty people. These were Bnei Yisrael in the midbar. Among them were great people, leaders, and heads of the nation. How could they look at Yehoshua and Calev, who were urging them to trust Hashem, and see them as criminals worthy of death?

The answer is that once the mistake was accepted, each new step made the next mistake easier. First, the meraglim gave their report. Then the people cried, ותשא כל העדה ויתנו את קולם ויבכו העם בלילה ההוא, the whole assembly raised their voice and cried that night. That public reaction itself became proof in the minds of the meraglim and the people. They could say, look, the entire nation understands that we are right. Everyone sees the danger. Everyone feels the fear. But a mistaken public reaction does not turn sheker into emes. The fact that many people are frightened does not prove that the fear is correct. The fact that a whole ציבור accepts an argument does not make it true. When the starting point is wrong, even the response of the crowd can become another layer of self-deception.

A Psak Built on a Crooked Beginning

The meraglim and the leaders did not necessarily present themselves as rebels. They could frame the matter as a serious question of pikuach nefesh. If entering Eretz Yisrael would endanger the men,

women, and children of Klal Yisrael, then perhaps it was forbidden to go forward. In their distorted reasoning, they could even say that the situation required them to appoint a new leader and return to Mitzrayim.

This is a frightening part of the chet. The rebellion was not only emotional. It was given the form of a decision. They treated fear as if it were halachic clarity. They looked at the strong nations and fortified cities, concluded that the people were in danger, and then used that conclusion to reject the direction of Moshe Rabbeinu. But that was exactly the mistake. If they truly believed there was a real question of pikuach nefesh, they should have brought it to Moshe Rabbeinu. They should have submitted the question to the authority of Torah. Instead, they became their own judges. They began from fear and negiah, and then built a whole structure of reasoning on top of it.

This is what happens when a person sins and is then led into further mistakes. כאשר האדם חוטא מכשילין אותו בטעויות נוספות, when a person sins, he is caused to stumble in additional mistakes. One wrong step does not remain alone. It creates a new way of seeing. It changes how a person understands facts, how he hears advice, how he judges risk, and how he views those who disagree with him.

When the Truth Looks Dangerous

Once the people accepted the argument that entering Eretz Yisrael was dangerous, Yehoshua and Calev began to look dangerous. In truth, they were the ones speaking with emunah. They said, עלה נעלה, we can surely go up and inherit it. They insisted that Hashem would help them. But in the eyes of a nation already trapped in fear, Yehoshua and Calev looked like men who were endangering everyone.

This explains how the people could reach the point of wanting to stone them. They were not thinking, let us kill tzaddikim. They were thinking, these men are pushing the nation into danger. If the people listen to Yehoshua and Calev, then the men will fall by the sword and the women and children will be taken captive. Once that was their way of looking at the situation, violence against Yehoshua and Calev could seem justified.

This is the most frightening part of the process. A person can be so blinded by a wrong beginning that emes looks like danger and danger looks like responsibility. The ones who are trying to save him look like enemies, and the ones pulling him away from Hashem's word look like protectors.

The Hidden Negiah of the Meraglim

Behind all of this stood the personal negiah of the meraglim. The Zohar explains that the meraglim feared that when Bnei Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael, they would lose their positions as leaders. In the midbar they were נשיאים, leaders of the tribes. In Eretz Yisrael, a new order might begin, and they might no longer hold the same honor.

This personal interest did not necessarily appear openly in their words. They did not say, we are afraid of losing our positions. They spoke about the strength of the nations, the size of the giants, and the danger to the people. Their argument sounded national, practical, and responsible. But underneath it was a private fear.

That is the power of negiah. A person does not always know how much his personal interest is shaping his thinking. He may speak sincerely. He may even believe that he is acting for the public good. But if his own honor, comfort, position, or fear is mixed into the

issue, his judgment can become crooked. He sees real facts, but interprets them through a distorted lens.

The Positive Side: Middah Tovah Merubah

The lesson does not end with the danger. There is also a positive side. Just as sin can lead a person into further mistakes, מידה טובה, מרובה, the measure of good is greater. When a person begins with a mitzvah and acts with a לב טהור, a pure heart, Shamayim helps him. His path is made successful.

A powerful example is the holy program of אבות ובנים, fathers and sons learning Torah together. Wherever the program was established, the ציבור accepted the idea fully. In a short time, crowds of children came with their fathers to the beis medrash and began to learn. The success was remarkable.

Yet the idea itself was not new. Fathers and sons learning together had always existed. So what gave this effort such special power? Such success can be an אות ברור, a clear sign, that the project began דבר שנעשה, with a pure heart, without personal motives, and without a desire for honor. בלב טהור ללא פניות אישיות וללא רצון לזכות בכבוד, בלב טהור מוכרח הוא שישא תוצאות חיוביות שכאלו, something done with a pure heart is bound to produce such positive results.

This is the opposite of the meraglim. They began with negiah, so their wisdom led them downward. Avos Ubanim began with purity, so a simple idea became a source of tremendous berachah.

Preparing the Ground for Siyata D'Shmaya

The final lesson is practical for every person. If we want to succeed, the first step is not cleverness, strategy, or public approval. The first step is to remove our own negios. Before giving advice, making a decision, criticizing someone else, or deciding what is right, a person has to ask himself honestly: what do I want here? Am I searching for the truth, or am I protecting myself? Am I acting for Hashem, or am I defending my honor, comfort, or position?

When a person removes personal interest, he prepares the ground for שפע של סייעתא דשמיא, an abundance of siyata d'Shmaya. A lev tahor allows the mind to see clearly. But when the heart is mixed with negiah, even a sharp mind can become a tool for the wrong side. The chet hameraglim shows how far hidden personal motives can go. They can turn fear into policy, policy into a false psak, and a false psak into hatred of the very people who speak the truth. But the success of Avos Ubanim shows the opposite. When something is done with a pure heart, without personal honor and without hidden agenda, it can draw a special berachah from Shamayim.

This was always true. But when one sees the fruits of a project built with purity, אי אפשר שלא לחוש בכך, it is impossible not to feel it. The avodah is לב טהור ולא פניות אישיות, a pure heart and no personal motives.

RAV SCHACHTER ON THE PARSHA I

Insights and Commentary Based on the Shiurim of Rav Hershel Schachter

Adapted by Dr. Allan Weissman

<https://tinyurl.com/RavSchachterontheParsha> and at torahweb.org

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Parshas Shelach

Archaeological Evidance

In 1887, Rav Gershon Henoch Leiner, the Radziner Rebbe, wrote the sefer Sefunei Temunei Chol about his attempt at identifying the techeiles. He was interested in preparing for the rebuilding of the

Beis HaMikdash and reinstating the offering of korbanos, and in order to accomplish this, the Kohanim would have to wear the bigdei kehunah, a number of which require techeiles. Regarding the mitzvah of tzitzis, there is a machlokes among the Tanna'im whether the techeiles strings are indispensable to the fulfillment of the mitzvah. The Ba'al HaMa'or held like the minority opinion that the techeiles strings are indispensable. In fact, the Ramban reports that the Ba'al HaMa'or did not wear tzitzis at all, following his view that there is no mitzvah to wear a tallis with only white strings. The accepted opinion, however, is that wearing a tallis without techeiles is a partial fulfillment of the mitzvah, although the complete mitzvah requires both the white and the techeiles strings. However, regarding bigdei kehunah, all agree that without techeiles, the garments are unfit for use in the avodah. The Radziner Rebbe felt that we should do our utmost to prepare for the functioning of the Third Beis HaMikdash, and, to that end, he embarked on a mission to re-discover the identity of the chilazon, which is used to dye the woolen techeiles strings. He opined that the cuttlefish was the chilazon and he encouraged his Chassidim to use this dye in the preparation of the strings of the tallis.

The Beis HaLevi disagreed with the Radziner Rebbe, but the exact nature of his disagreement is a matter of debate. In the collection of correspondence between the Rebbe and other gedolim regarding the techeiles, an anonymous letter written by a close acquaintance of the Beis HaLevi explains the latter's position. He writes that if the Rebbe would have proven that the chilazon was a sea creature that the earlier generations were unaware of, the Beis HaLevi would have been prepared to agree with his conclusion. However, the dye of the cuttlefish had been recognized for centuries, and since the earlier generations did not make use of this sea creature in the preparation of techeiles, that is tantamount to a masorah that the Rebbe's findings were incorrect and that the cuttlefish is not the chilazon. The Soloveitchik family, however, has a different tradition as to what the Beis HaLevi's objection was. We heard from Rav Soloveitchik, as the Soloveitchik cousins heard from the Brisker Rav, that even if the cuttlefish was, in fact, the true chilazon, it still would remain unusable. In order to identify the chilazon, an unbroken chain of masorah is necessary, and the masorah cannot be reconstructed based on archaeological evidence. Rav Elyashiv believed that the objection of the Beis HaLevi must have been as described in the first version. That is, if a species of sea creature that was not available since the time of the Ge'onim, when the tradition concerning the identity of the chilazon was lost, were now to be rediscovered, it would be acceptable. Scientific, historical, or archaeological proof can, in fact, be relied upon to reconstruct a forgotten masorah.

The Gemara in Bava Basra relates that an Arab merchant showed Rabbah bar bar Chanah those who had perished during the forty years of wandering in the midbar in the time of Moshe. After he returned, his colleagues said to him that he ought to have counted the threads and counted the wound sections of their tzitzis to report whether they had a total of six or eight strings at each corner, so as to know whether the halachah is in accordance with Beis Shammai or Beis Hillel who disputed this point. It seems clear from this Gemara that observation of the archaeological evidence would have been admissible. Similarly, the Gemara in Sukkah relates that Rabbi Eliezer saw the actual tzitz of the Kohen Gadol in Rome and testified that the words קודש ליה were inscribed on only one line. The Rambam

rules that the inscription should preferably be written on two separate lines, ליה on the upper line and קודש on the lower line. The Rambam adds, however, that bedi'evah, if the inscription was written on one line, it is acceptable. The Kesef Mishnah explains that the Rambam knew this from the testimony of Rabbi Eliezer, which is considered valid factual verification. A third discussion of archaeological evidence involves the well-known dispute between Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam as to the proper order of parshiyos in the tefillin. The Bach writes of a report from Eretz Yisrael that Rashi tefillin were found at the gravesite of Yechezkel HaNavi, implying that these are the tefillin with the correct order of parshiyos. The Derishah counters that it may be that these tefillin were archived in genizah specifically because they were unfit for use due to their incorrect order of parshiyos. Both sides of the argument seem to hold that in principle, archaeological evidence, if properly analyzed, is indeed acceptable. This understanding paves the way for reliance on the recent evidence identifying the chilazon as the Murex Trunculus snail to restore the masorah of authentic techeiles. Even if the evidence proves to be incorrect, the Gemara in Menachos states clearly that if an imitation techeiles, such as kla ilan, is used in error, the indigo thread should be considered like white thread. The mitzvah of tzitzis will still be fulfilled with these white strings, albeit in an incomplete fashion. While there is a custom to use white strings as tzitzis, as this Gemara states, the use of blue-colored strings instead of white ones would not affect the fulfillment of the mitzvah. Therefore, since there exists at least a safek that we are now using authentic techeiles, we should apply the principle of ספק דאורייתא לחומרא, a doubt in relation to a d'oraisa obligation is decided stringently, and be required to make use of the current techeiles. This principle applies despite the fact that even after one purchases the current techeiles strings and uses them in his tallis, he still will not know if he did, in fact, succeed in accomplishing the mitzvah. The argument that one should not engage in activities that seem like arrogance should have no relevance in this case, since that consideration is limited to the fulfillment of a middas chassidus, not when fulfilling a halachic requirement like techeiles in tzitzis.

In fact, it would seem that wearing a tallis without the techeiles strings would constitute a violation of the lo sa'aseh of bal tigrā, not to detract from the mitzvos of the Torah. The Beis HaLevi elucidates the definition of this issur. If one has detracted from a mitzvah to such an extent that he has not fulfilled the mitzvah at all, that would not be labeled as bal tigrā, but as a bitul hamitzvah, which means cancellation of the mitzvah. Bal tigrā refers to a case in which a mitzvah is knowingly performed lechatchilah in a way in which it is fulfilled only bedi'evah, in an incomplete fashion. Since we hold the absence of techeiles strings does not affect the mitzvah of wearing the white strings, one fulfills the mitzvah with the white strings alone. Nevertheless, if techeiles strings are available but are not used, resulting in an incomplete fulfillment of the mitzvah, one violates bal tigrā. Since the obligation of tzitzis only applies if and when one dons a four-cornered garment, and our opting to wear the tallis in order to obligate ourselves in the mitzvah is done only as a middas chassidus, it would be better for one not to wear this tallis at all!

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date: Jun 9, 2026, 11:59 PM

Parshas Shlach - **The Spies Were Smitten by the Greatest Blindness There Is**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1385 – Techeiles Today-Why Not? Good Shabbos!

I would like to share two Medrashim from Parshas Shelach. The first is in Medrash Rabbah Parsha 16 Siman 3. The Medrash quotes the pasuk “Grass withers and blossom fades, but the word of our G-d shall stand forever.” (Yeshaya 40:8). Then the Medrash, as it often does, asks, to what may the matter be compared?

The Medrash cites a mashal (parable) of a king who had a friend. The king promised his friend: “Walk with me and I will then give you a big present.” The friend of the king began to accompany him, but the friend then died. The king said to the surviving son of this friend: “Even though your father died (and therefore, strictly speaking, I don't need to give you the present that I promised him), I am still going to give you the present. Come and take it, because I am a man of my word.”

The Medrash says: So too, with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. The king in the mashal is Hakadosh Baruch Hu and the friend is Avraham Avinu (as it is written “the seed of Avraham my friend” (ohavi))” (Yeshaya 41:8). Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to Avraham Avinu “Walk with Me” – as it is written “Lech Lecha (Go forth) from your land, from your birthplace, from the house of your father to the Land that I will show you” (Bereshis 12:1). He promised to give Avraham a present – Eretz Yisrael.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe that even though Avraham Avinu (and the other Avos) to whom I promised Eretz Yisrael already died, I am not retracting My promise. I will keep My promise (and give Eretz Yisrael to their descendants). That is the message of the above cited Medrash.

The analogy of the Medrash is somewhat problematic. When the king told his friend, “I am going to give you a present,” he specifically promised to give the present to his friend. He didn't say anything about the children. However, Hashem promised Eretz Yisrael to the children of the Avos: “Lecha et-ne-na u'l'zarecha” – I will give it to you and to your children! Eretz Yisrael was promised to the descendants of Avraham Avinu, so there is no comparison to the mashal of the Medrash.

The Avnei Nezer (1838-1910) (the Socachover Rebbe) interprets this Medrash. He says that the meraglim (spies) represented a sea change in the attitude of Klal Yisrael. From the time of Yetzias Mitzrayim until now, there was one constant in Klal Yisrael: They asked no kashas. They had no questions on the Ribono shel Olam. They followed with blind faith. They trusted the Ribono shel Olam one hundred per cent.

This, in fact, was an emulation of the attribute of Avraham Avinu. When Avraham was told “Lech lecha m'artzecha, u'mi'moladetecha, u'mi'beis avicha,” he didn't ask where he should go, he didn't ask how long the trip was going to take and he didn't ask how he should travel. He went with full faith in the Ribono shel Olam.

This blind faith was put into practice for Avraham and all his descendants until Parshas Shelach. However, when the people were on the outskirts of Eretz Yisrael and sensed that the time of entry into the land was upon them, they adopted a different attitude. “That is not how you conquer a country!” They insisted that the proper way to conquer a country is to first spy out the land.

This marked a sea change. They determined that their journey forward would have to be “normal” – al pi derecho hateva. From this point on, there was a lack of full faith and trust in the Ribono shel Olam. Therefore, in that sense, they were no longer the spiritual descendants of Avraham Avinu. The hallmark of the descendants of Avraham Avinu is “Lechtech Acharei bamidbar b'erez lo zeruah” (you followed after Me in the Wilderness in an unsown land) (Yirmiyahu 2:2). No questions asked. When the Ribono shel Olam says “Jump,” you say “How high?”

So even though now they were no longer spiritually included in the promise “I will give Eretz Yisrael to you and your descendants,” nevertheless the Ribono shel Olam said, “I will give you Eretz Yisrael anyway.” That is the point of the Medrash. Just like in the mashal where the king said “I will give it to the son despite the fact that the father is no longer here,” so too, despite the fact that through their current actions and attitudes, Bnei Yisrael could not still claim to be true spiritual heirs of Avraham Avinu, nevertheless, the Ribono shel Olam still gave them Eretz Yisrael.

* * * * *

The other Medrash I would like to share is the Medrash found in Shelach 16 Siman 4. The Medrash refers to the pasuk “Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so too is a lazy one to those who send him.” (Mishlei 10:26) This means that just like everyone hates the taste of vinegar, so too the meraglim, who spoke lashon hara about Eretz Yisrael are hated. The Medrash critiques the meraglim as being lazy in fulfillment of their mission to spy out Eretz Yisrael. Without this Medrash, we might have said plenty of negative things about the meraglim, but laziness is probably not one of them. They traveled throughout Eretz Yisrael from border to border over a forty-day period. Why does the Medrash call them lazy?

I saw an interpretation in the name of Rav Shraga Grossbard (who was niftar in 1993 in Eretz Yisrael). He said that there are two types of laziness. There is physical laziness and there is mental laziness. Physical laziness is when someone does not get out of bed and does not do what he is supposed to do. He procrastinates, etc. However, there is also mental laziness, where someone does not pause to think and contemplate what is really happening.

Rav Grossbard said that the Medrash here is referring to mental laziness. The meraglim were guilty of this resistance to thinking. When they entered Eretz Yisrael and noticed the abundance of burials taking place, they claimed, “It is a land that consumes its inhabitants.” They could have noticed that their identity as spies was not being discovered because everyone was busy with funerals. However, they came to the opposite conclusion, saying “It is a land that consumes its inhabitants.”

I live half a mile from Sol Levenson and Brothers (the Jewish funeral parlor in Baltimore). They have their share of funerals, but they don't have them around the clock every single day. There are days when no funerals take place.

Does it make any sense that the whole country is burying people every day without there being some kind of plague? How do they look at this? If they take the superficial route, it must be a land that kills its inhabitants. But if they analyze it a bit more and delve into the matter, maybe Hashem is doing them a favor. Maybe He is keeping the populace preoccupied so that they don't notice the meraglim spying out the land from border to border. However, to arrive at this second conclusion, a person needs to think a bit. The

Medrash is saying that they were lazy concerning such level of analysis by not probing what was really happening. Why were they lazy? To answer this, we must cite the famous Zohar that the reason they didn't want to probe was because, in a certain way, they did not want to go into Eretz Yisrael. They knew they would lose their positions of honor if they went into Eretz Yisrael, and therefore they were blinded by that knowledge. They saw what they wanted to see, and they believed what they wanted to believe. That colored their perspective. That is why they were "lazy in thought process." They wanted to come back with a report that said, "This is not for us."

We know from life that people do this all the time. They know what they want to know and they see what they want to see. In this connection, I found another Medrash in Parshas Toldos. The Medrash speaks of a country that was drafting an army for the king. A prerequisite for this army was that recruits had to be tall and strong and swift.

There was a certain woman who had a son who was a midget. She used to call her child "my swift tall child." She asked the king's officers "Why did you not draft my son? After all he is tall and swift!" They said to her, "Maybe in your eyes he is tall and swift, but in our eyes, he is a dwarf amongst dwarves."

When a child is four feet five inches tall, how can a mother, who knows that the requirement for the army is being six feet-five-inches tall, ask, "Why aren't you drafting my son – he is tall and swift?!" How does this happen? This is an extreme example of a person seeing what he wants to see. That is what happened to the meraglim. It is in that sense that the Medrash calls them lazy. They were lazy in that they did not delve and they did not probe. They did not look at the situation and declare, "This does not make any sense. What does it mean?" They were blinded by the greatest blindness there is – the ability to only see what they want to see and not to see what is really there.

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Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Sh'lach is provided below: 016 Mixed Seating at Weddings 061 – The Minyan: Who Counts? 105 – Tallis: Does it Cover Only Married Men? 150 – Tzitzis: Must They Be Worn? 197 – Carrying Medicine on Shabbos 243 – The Concept of Prison in Jewish Law 287 – Women and Tzitzis 333 – Techeiles Today 377 – Tzitzis: Must They Be Seen? 421 – The Issur of Histaklus 465 – Donning a Tallis for The Amud 509 – Ain Ma'averin Al Hamitzvos 553 – Women and Tzitzis Revisited 597 – Davening at the Graves of Tzadikim ... 1559 – A Silver Atara for Your Talis: Is It a Good Idea? 1601 – Visiting a Cemetery to Daven – Not As Simple As You May Think A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org.

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The Future of Jews in America

Looking around the country today, the America we Jews have come to know, appreciate, and love is becoming increasingly unrecognizable. While this may have been true the last several years on a cultural level with the move towards more progressive values and blurring of definitions, lines, and institutions in ways that are totally incompatible with our sacred tradition,

now it is true in a more personal and specific way, a way that makes us feel increasingly uncomfortable and unsafe.

In his Halachic responsa, Rav Moshe Feinstein, himself an immigrant from Europe in 1937 fleeing from increased anti-Jewish sentiment and Soviet religious persecution, described America as a malchus shel chesed, a kingdom of kindness for the Jewish people. Similarly, Rabbi Menashe Klein (the Ungvarer Rav) and Rav Moshe Stern (the Debreciner Rav), who moved to America after surviving the Holocaust, describe this country in their teshuvos as a medinah shel chesed, a benevolent nation.

What might they write today about the same country that features, as a major party candidate for U.S. Senate, a man who for years unabashedly sported a tattoo of the Nazi SS "Totenkopf?" At a rally this week for this candidate in Portland, when asked, "Would an Israeli flag tattoo be a deal breaker?" one attendee said, "Honestly yeah, because I don't support genocide." While that only represents one voter's view, this candidate continues to be endorsed by mainstream leaders of the Democratic Party despite the reporting about his vile Jew hate, among other disturbing problems.

Dan Bilzerian, who has 30 million Instagram followers, is on the ballot as a Republican in Florida's 6th Congressional District. While he has little chance of winning, as an extremist, vulgar antisemite, his mere presence on the ballot combined with whatever percentage of the votes he will get, is jarring.

Literally as I was sitting down to write this, members of the neo-Nazi group Blood Tribe marched through Athens, Georgia carrying a swastika banner, and a sitting member of Congress delivered a rant against Israel filled with long-debunked falsehoods. It truly seems not a day goes by in this country without one or more terrible stories involving antisemitic rhetoric or, worse, actual violence, and it is coming from all parties and all sides.

So what is the future for Jews in America? Is it the Malchus and Medinah shel chesed, a country of unprecedented religious freedom, a democracy that awards rights and protection to our people? Or is it, as other ancestors warned, a "treifene medinah," a place that Jews don't belong, a country that will compromise and corrupt us morally and physically?

As we approach the celebration of America's 250th anniversary, for Jews living here, this is an essential question. Certainly, American Jews—like those throughout the Diaspora—should be asking ourselves not if, but when we will move to Israel. That is the destiny and must be the destination for us all.

But in the meantime, is our time in America just a holding pattern, a passive, meaningless stopover? Rav Aharon Kotler certainly didn't think so. In a time when it was tremendously unpopular to move here, Rav Aharon saw his immigration to America in religious terms, as a mission connected with the fulfillment of a prophecy of Rav Chaim Volozhener. In a tradition relayed by not only Rav Aharon Kotler, but Rav Chaim Ozer, Rav Yaakov Ruderman, Rav Dovid Lifschitz, Rav Aharon Soloveitchik and others, in 1803, at the laying of the cornerstone of his yeshiva in Volozhin, Rav Chaim Volozhener tearfully told his talmidim, "This will not be the final station of Torah before Moshiach. Torah has yet to flourish in the American before he can come. America will be the final stop of galus."

Rav Aharon Kotler took this as a charge to build Torah in the New World. He planted the seeds for what would become the largest yeshiva in the world and a network of kollelim in communities around America.

Speaking about the purpose of being spread throughout the galus more generally, Rav Gedalya Schorr (Ohr Gedalyahu, Shemini Atzeres) writes that Hashem sends us to different countries and cities to collect the righteous converts and to redeem the sparks in each location. We aren't there passively or accidentally; we are there with a mission and a purpose. By that standard, have the Jewish people succeeded in impacting America? Have we brought Torah values and ideals to this country? The answer is a resounding yes. In midst of the September 2000 presidential campaign, amid the national conversation about the religious observance of Joe Lieberman a"h, Michael Novak, a non-Jewish writer and philosopher who often wrote on theology, wrote in the New York Times:

I am pulling for Bush and Cheney, not Gore and Lieberman, and I am not Jewish but Roman Catholic. Still, I love what Senator Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew, is doing to wake this nation up to its deepest identity, rooted in Jewishness.

John Adams wrote, "I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation." He wrote as a Christian, but added that even if he were an atheist and believed in chance, "I should believe that chance had ordered the Jews to preserve and propagate to all mankind the doctrine of a supreme, intelligent, wise, almighty sovereign of the universe, which I believe to be the great essential principle of all morality, and consequently of all civilization."...

The best kept secret of American history is that the favorite language of that founding generation came from the Torah. The founders referred to their own experiment as the Second Israel. They commissioned a design for the Great Seal with a symbol recalling the first Israel, for they thought of themselves as crossing the deserts of Egypt en route to building a "city on the hill."

Ben Franklin proposed as a motto of the Republic "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." It fit the American circumstance. The signers of the Declaration, after all, were committing treason. They needed some sort of moral warrant. They also needed hope that they could avoid the hangman's noose; they faced the most powerful army and navy in the world. It helped that they believed that Providence would assist them and that Providence had created the world so that liberty would in the end prevail. For without liberty, how could the Creator, who desired the friendship of free women and men rather than the worship of slaves, fulfill his eternal purposes?

Most historians lazily say that the founders were Deists, because they did not use Christian names for God, like Trinity and Savior and Redeemer. They miss the crucial point. Three names for God in the Declaration — Creator, Judge and Providence, are unmistakably Jewish names for God. This language did not come from the Greeks or Romans...

If for whatever reason our time in America is not yet over, we must be here with a sense of purpose and mission. Certainly, it is to defend and advocate for our values, morals and principles.

But in this moment, I think it is something even more.

As America celebrates 250 years, particularly for those who subscribe to "America First," we must speak of how America first came to be. This country was born from an extraordinary faith, deeply informed by the language and ideas of the Jewish Bible. When our Founders wrote in the Declaration of Independence that all men are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights," they were echoing the first chapter of Genesis, that every human being is created b'tzelem Elokim, in the image of God. When they appealed to "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God," they were affirming that there is a moral law higher than any king, any parliament, or polling data. When they concluded, "with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence," they spoke in the language of our prophets, a people placing its destiny in the hands of Heaven.

America must stand true to the principles, values, and ideals that made her exceptional in the first place.

The right for even someone with a Nazi tattoo to run for office is an American value. For anyone to endorse or vote for him is a grossly un-American value. The right to protest Israel, or even speak of Israel and Jews in vile terms, is American. The failure to stand with Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East, the land from which America's own values drew, is un-American.

The right to platform purveyors of hate is American. To amplify their message, spread evil lies against Israel or the Jewish people on college campuses, outside of Synagogues and even in the halls of Congress, is un-American.

As we approach this significant milestone, it is a critical time for us to stand tall and proud and tell our fellow citizens that antisemitism and anti-Zionism are not about hatred of the Jew alone. These beliefs are not only un-American, they are rooted in hatred of America.

We must align with allies, religious leaders, elected leaders and influencers to return and restore this great country to its roots. If America is to remain a medinah shel chesed, we cannot outsource that work to others. Each of us must ask: What am I doing to make my home more Jewish, my community more courageous, my elected officials more accountable, my non-Jewish neighbors more informed, and my children more proud? We must live with gratitude for this country, loyalty to our people, longing for Eretz Yisrael, and a renewed sense of responsibility for the sacred mission of Torah in America. We must work to ensure it remains a medina and malchus of chesed and not a treifene medinah.

from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>

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Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Finding the Needle in the Haystack

Every year, when we encounter Parshas Shlach, we are forced to confront one of the most painful questions in the Torah: How could they? How could Bnei Yisrael, after witnessing the ten makkos, after crossing the Yam Suf, after standing at Har Sinai and experiencing a revelation unprecedented in human history, reject Hashem's plan to bring them into Eretz Yisrael? Already at the burning bush, in Sefer Shemos, Hashem had made the plan unmistakably clear: He would take Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim and bring them to "eretz tovah u'rechavah - a good and spacious land", a land flowing with milk and honey. Yetzias Mitzrayim was never meant to end at freedom from slavery alone. It was always meant to culminate in entry into Eretz Yisrael. And yet, when the moment finally arrived, Bnei Yisrael hesitated. In Parshas Devarim, as Moshe Rabbeinu reviews the events of the midbar during the final days of his life, he describes the request to send spies in striking language: "Vatikrevun eilai kulchem - all of you approached me". Rashi, commenting on the word "kulchem," explains that they came in a state of "irbuva," confusion and disorder. This was not a dignified request presented calmly by the elders. It was a scene of pressure, fear, and panic. Younger people pushed ahead of elders. The nation was overtaken by anxiety. That panic itself already revealed the problem. After everything Hashem had done for them, should they have been afraid? The tragedy of the meraglim was not merely that they misread military realities. It was that they failed to believe in Hashem's word. They looked at the fortified cities and the mighty inhabitants of the land and concluded that the task was beyond them. In effect, they allowed fear to overpower faith.

Dovid HaMelech (Tehillim 106) summarizes this failure with devastating clarity: "Vayim'asu b'eret chemdah, lo he'eminu lidvaro - they despised the desirable land; they did not believe His word. The problem was not only strategic hesitation; it was rejection. Eretz Yisrael, the land Hashem had chosen and promised, became in their eyes a source of dread rather than desire.

The pesukim in Tehillim continue: they grumbled in their tents and did not listen to the voice of Hashem. As a result, Hashem took an oath concerning them, that they would fall in the wilderness and that their descendants would be scattered among the nations. Where do we find that oath in Parshas Shlach itself?

The Netziv (in Haamek Davar) identifies a remarkable "needle in the haystack." After Moshe Rabbeinu pleads on behalf of Bnei Yisrael, Hashem responds with the familiar words, "Salachti kidvarecha," I have forgiven according to your words. These words introduce our tefillos on Yom Kippur night as we begin Kol Nidrei. But this forgiveness was not complete absolution. The very next passuk states, "Ulam chai Ani, v'yimalei kevod Hashem es kol ha'aretz." Literally, this means: "But as I live, the glory of Hashem shall fill the entire earth." Rashi explains that "chai ani" is a language of oath. Hashem is swearing. But what exactly is the oath? The Netziv explains that the phrase "chai Ani" does not merely identify the speaker. It expresses the greatness and authority of the One who speaks. Just as Pharaoh says to Yosef, "Ani Pharaoh," not simply to identify himself, but to invoke the power of his kingship, so too, when Hashem says "chai Ani,"

He is invoking His own kavod and majesty. And what is that kavod? "V'yimalei kevod Hashem es kol ha'aretz," the glory of Hashem will fill the entire world. Had Bnei Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael with faith, Moshe Rabbeinu would have led them into the land, the Beis Hamikdash would have been built, and Hashem's presence would have radiated outward from Yerushalayim. The world would have witnessed the miraculous relationship between Hashem and His people from the center point of holiness, from Eretz Yisrael itself. That was Plan A.

But when Bnei Yisrael rejected the land, when they said "efes – but" the people are too strong, and when they allowed fear to drown out faith, Hashem revealed another path. If His glory would not be revealed through a nation living securely in its land, it would be revealed through a nation scattered throughout the world. Again and again, throughout Jewish history, we would become too successful, too visible, too envied. The nations would rise against us, try to destroy us, and yet Hashem would save us from their hands. This became Plan B. Hashem's glory would fill the world not only through the Beis Hamikdash, but through Jewish survival. Through exile. Through persecution. Through the impossible endurance of Am Yisrael. Yet Parshas Shlach also contains the seed of return. The sin of the meraglim was a rejection of Eretz Yisrael, but our avodah is to transform that rejection into longing. This idea appears beautifully in connection with the mitzvah of bikurim. The mishnah (Bikurim) describes how a person would go down into his field and identify the first fruits: "Keitzad mafrishin habikurim - how does one separate the first fruits? He sees a fig that has ripened, a cluster of grapes that has ripened, or a pomegranate that has ripened, and he ties a reed around it, declaring, 'Harei eilu bikurim - these are bikurim.'" The question is obvious. The Torah identifies seven special species of Eretz Yisrael: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates. Why, then, does the mishnah highlight only three: figs, grapes, and pomegranates? Rav Menachem Zemba explains that these three fruits are not random; they are precisely the fruits brought back by the meraglim. The Torah tells us that the spies returned with a cluster of grapes, along with pomegranates and figs. They used the fruits of Eretz Yisrael to frighten the people. Look how enormous they are, they implied. This land is not for ordinary people. It belongs to giants. Its blessing became, in their hands, a source of intimidation. The meraglim took the fruits of Eretz Yisrael and used them to degrade the land. Bikurim comes to repair that distortion. The Jew goes into his field in Eretz Yisrael and finds those very same fruits: the fig, the grape, and the pomegranate. But now they are not carried as evidence against the land. They are brought to Yerushalayim as an expression of gratitude, love, and yearning. What the meraglim used to create fear, we use to express devotion.

This also helps us understand a striking feature of the bracha of Me'ein Shalosh, the condensed blessing recited after eating grain products, wine, or fruits from the seven species. In that bracha, we thank Hashem for "eret chemdah tovah u'rechavah - the desirable, good, and spacious land" that He gave to our forefathers, "le'echol mipiryah v'lisboa mituvah - to eat of its fruit and be satisfied from its goodness."

At first glance, this is difficult. Is that why we long for Eretz Yisrael, merely to eat its fruit? The Gemara (Sotah) asks a similar question about Moshe Rabbeinu's desire to enter the land. Did Moshe want to enter Eretz Yisrael simply to enjoy its produce? Of course not. The fruit of Eretz Yisrael is not merely agricultural. It represents the kedushah of the land, the mitzvos hateluyos ba'aretz, and the unique relationship between Hashem, His people, and His land.

When we recite Me'ein Shalosh after eating from the seven species, we are not merely thanking Hashem for flavor or nourishment. We are expressing our longing for the full spiritual life of Eretz Yisrael, including the mitzvah of bikurim and the experience of bringing the first fruits to the Beis Hamikdash. Every fig, every grape, every pomegranate becomes a reminder of the great reversal we seek. The fruits that were once used to push the Jewish people away from the land are now used to draw us back. This is the

movement from cheit to tikkun, from rejection to yearning, from panic to faith.

And perhaps, in our own times, we are privileged to witness a further stage in that process. After centuries of exile, after the horrors of persecution and the devastation of the Holocaust, a remarkable transformation has taken place. More and more of Am Yisrael is returning home. The Jewish people are once again building, planting, learning, defending, and living in Eretz Yisrael. The world watches, sometimes in admiration and sometimes in hostility, but it cannot ignore the bond between Hashem, His people, and His land.

For so long, Hashem's glory was revealed through our survival in exile. But now, perhaps, we are beginning to return from Plan B toward Plan A. We are moving from dispersion back to ingathering, from wandering back to home, from the fruits of fear back to the fruits of bikurim. The meraglim saw the greatness of Eretz Yisrael and became afraid. Our task is to see that same greatness and become inspired.

May we merit the day when the longing expressed in Me'ein Shalosh becomes fully realized, when we once again bring bikurim to the Beis Hamikdash, and when "v'yimalei kevod Hashem es kol ha'aretz," the glory of Hashem fills the entire world.

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

date: Jun 10, 2026, 11:28 PM

subject: **Rav Kook on Korach**: The Corruption of a Judge 'Two Lawyers Conversing' by Honoré Daumier, 1808–1879 (Wikimedia Commons)

Korach: The Corruption of a Judge

What makes a judge dishonest? What are the cognitive stages in the corruption of a leader?

The Torah legislates support for the judges and teachers of Israel — the kohanim and Levites — through a system of tithes and gifts. This system provides them with a degree of financial independence, making them less susceptible to bribes and moneyed interests.

Biblical Scandal

Not every leader, however, maintains the standards of integrity that his public office demands. The Torah notes that the sons of the prophet Samuel did not follow in their father's path of selfless public service. On the contrary, "they went after gain, took bribes and subverted justice" (I Sam. 8:3).

What brought about their judicial corruption? What were the root causes? The Sages offered several possibilities for the failings of Samuel's sons. At first glance, this appears to be a litany of various abuses of power. A careful reading, however, will recognize a pattern in their statements.

Rav Kook explained that the Talmud describes a progression of increasingly serious offenses. The Sages were not disagreeing about the facts in the case. They were mapping out the moral decline of a leader, step by step, into the morass of deceit and corruption.

Here are the various opinions, as quoted in Shabbat 56a:

According to Rabbi Yonatan, Samuel's sons were not, in fact, guilty of any true crime. Their fault was in their failure to replicate the exemplary public service of their father. Samuel would travel all over the country, providing judicial services for the people. His sons, on the other hand, stayed in their own court, and "increased the fees of their clerks and scribes."

Rabbi Meir said: They would openly demand their salaries.

Rabbi Yehudah said: They compelled private individuals to conduct their business affairs.

Rabbi Akiva said: They would forcibly take an extra measure of tithes.

Rabbi Yossi said: They took gifts by force.

What is the significance of all of these offenses? Let us follow the descent of the crooked politician, as he slides into the cesspool of graft and corruption.

Down-to-Earth Leadership

We can learn much about genuine public service from Samuel. The Torah praises Samuel for traveling around the country and judging the people in their towns (I Sam. 7:16). Why was this important?

A true leader considers himself to be literally a servant of the public. His dedication to the community is reflected in his sensitivity to their problems and concerns. He governs and advises them, not according to his own station in life, but as if he is standing in their shoes.

This is the significance of Samuel's custom of judging the people in their hometowns. Samuel was able to identify their needs and challenges. As a result, his rulings were appropriate and his guidance was effective.

This type of leader is able to make a direct connection with the people. He does not need the trappings of officialdom. He does not surround himself with layers of bureaucrats and government officials.

Samuel's sons, however, failed to emulate this level of leadership. They would judge the people without leaving their city, without adjusting their mindset. In their eyes, they adjudicated properly. In addition, they required the assistance of a system of salaried clerks and scribes. As Rabbi Yonatan noted, this was not a crime. But it certainly falls short of the ideal of leadership as epitomized by Samuel.

Step 1: Just a Job

The other scholars taught that Samuel's sons were in fact guilty of graft. They described the various steps down the path of political corruption. Like all moral failings, abuse of authority comes in stages. Its danger and severity is magnified, of course, according to the power and influence of the position. The first failing may appear to be minor, but it is indicative of a problematic attitude that is the root cause of more serious abuse. A community leader, and especially a spiritual leader, should recognize that public service is a great privilege. This recognition should be strong enough to make one willing to forgo financial remuneration. In fact, a true leader, aware of the importance of his work, may even feel a certain degree of impropriety in accepting payment.

Rabbi Meir described the fault of Samuel's sons as "openly demanding their salaries." They failed to value the importance of their public service. By demanding payment, they showed that they looked at their work as a job like any other — and not a sacred calling that is its own reward.

Step 2: Using Others

From this stage, it is but a small step to actual abuse of power. Once a leader is no longer altruistic in his attitude towards public service, he will begin to see it as a burden. He will have no scruples about forcing others to handle his personal affairs. Since I take care of their needs, he reasons, why shouldn't they take care of mine?

This is the wrongdoing identified by Rabbi Yehudah: "They compelled private individuals to conduct their business affairs."

Step 3: Grabbing For More

From here it is another small step to the next level of corruption. Rav Kook noted that one who fails to live up to the moral demands of his position will ultimately sink below the ordinary standard of ethical behavior.

Leading and judging should be an inspiring vocation. A leader should feel that he is helping build a safer, more equitable society. In the words of the Talmud (Shabbat 10a), an honest judge is "God's partner in creation." But a flawed character, together with a failure to value his public work, will undermine the leader's sense of propriety and justice. Instead of values based on a sense of justice, he is ensnared by the glitter of superficial honors.

His lack of integrity is expressed quantitatively — he takes "an extra portion of tithes" — as well as qualitatively — he takes it by force.

Step 4: Legal in Name Alone

As long as he retains some semblance of morality, such a leader will not try to seize that which he has no legal claim to. But his dishonesty may lead to the lowest level, when justice and propriety are empty shells, high-minded words lacking any true content. He views the judicial system as merely a tool to ensure social order. It has no connection to our aspirations for an ethical society.

This is the level described by Rabbi Yossi: "They took gifts by force." If they were taken by force, how can they be called gifts? This is a form of legal manipulation that is legal in name only. He may call them "gifts" or "contributions," but in fact they were taken forcibly. Calling them gifts only serves to silence what little is left of his conscience, allowing him to justify his crimes.

These are the stages in the descent of a judge corrupted by the lure of superficial honors and financial gain — a leader who should have been organizing society according to the foundations of justice and morality. (Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 52-54)

from: **Michal Horowitz** <michalhorowitz@gmail.com>

Shelach 5786: **Bread of Faith**

June 11, 2026

Toward the end of Parshas Shelach, following the episode of the spies, the Torah introduces the mitzvah of hafrashas challah (Bamidbar 15:17-21).

Hashem commands: וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר, דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם בְּבָאֲכֶם אֶל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם... רְאִישֵׁית עֲרֹסְתֶכֶם חֶלֶה תְרִימוּ תְרוּמָה - אֶל-הָאֲרֶז אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְבִיא אֲתֶכֶם שָׁמָּה... Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the Land to which I am bringing you... from the first of your dough you shall set aside challah as a gift.

Rashi, commenting on the words "בְּבָאֲכֶם אֶל-הָאֲרֶז" - when you come into the Land," notes that the Torah specifically connects this mitzvah to entry into Eretz Yisrael. Unlike other mitzvos ha'teluyos ba'aretz that became effective once the nation conquered and settled the land, challah would become an obligation as soon as the nation entered the Land.

What do we learn from the command of challah, which is chosen as one of the first mitzvos associated with settling Eretz Yisrael?

Perhaps the answer lies in the symbolism of bread itself.

Bread represents the most basic staple of human existence. It is the food that sustains life. Yet the Torah teaches that even before a person partakes of his bread, he must first separate a portion for Hashem (this was done by giving the separated piece of challah to a kohen). The message is clear: our sustenance is not solely the product of our labor, effort, or success. It is ultimately a gift from Hashem.

This idea is expressed beautifully elsewhere in the Torah. At the end of his life, Moshe reminds the Bnei Yisrael: וַיַּעֲבֹד וַיַּרְעִבְךָ וַיֹּאכִלְךָ אֶת-הַמָּן... לְמַעַן הוֹדִיעֶךָ - He afflicted you and caused you to hunger, and He fed you the manna... in order to make known to you that man does not live by bread alone, but by all that emanates from the mouth of Hashem does man live (Devarim 8:3).

The lesson of the manna was that physical sustenance is never merely physical. Bread nourishes the body, but its ability to sustain life comes from Hashem.

Furthermore, the Torah commands: וְאָכַלְתָּ וּשְׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל-הָאָרֶץ - הַטְּבִיחָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתְךָ לָךְ - You shall eat, be satisfied, and bless Hashem your G-d for the good land that He has given you (Devarim 8:10).

When a person is hungry, it is easy to turn to Hashem. The greater challenge comes after one has eaten and is satisfied. Success and abundance can create the illusion of self-sufficiency. Therefore, once we have eaten and are satiated, the Torah commands us to acknowledge the true Source of our blessings.

Perhaps this is the deeper connection between challah and entry into Eretz Yisrael.

In the wilderness, Bnei Yisrael ate manna that descended openly from Heaven. The hand of Hashem was visible each day. In Eretz Yisrael, however, bread would come through plowing, planting, harvesting, grinding and baking. Human effort would play a far greater role. The danger was that a person may begin to believe that his success is entirely his own doing. Therefore, one of the first mitzvos associated with the Land is challah. Before enjoying the bread that emerges from one's labor, a portion is set aside for Hashem. This act transforms an ordinary loaf into a reminder that all blessing originates with Him.

There is an additional dimension to the mitzvah of challah as well. The Torah does not require that challah be separated from grain growing in the field, or from individual stalks of wheat. The obligation begins only after the grain has been transformed into dough, when a portion designated for Hashem.

Perhaps this teaches that we are meant to recognize Hashem not only at the beginning of a process, but especially at its completion. We often focus on the finished product and take satisfaction in what we have accomplished. The Torah therefore instructs us that at the very moment we are ready to enjoy the results of our efforts, we must pause and acknowledge the Source.

In this way, challah becomes a powerful expression of gratitude. Just when a person might be tempted to say, "I made this!" the Torah asks him to remember that every stage of the process - the land, the rain, the harvest, the strength to work, and the ability to succeed - is from Hashem.

The mitzvah of challah teaches us humility, in addition to gratitude. It reminds us to recognize the partnership between human effort and Divine blessing. We are obligated to work, to strive, and to utilize the talents Hashem has given us. Yet we must never lose sight of the Source from which all blessing ultimately flows.

Perhaps this is why the mitzvah of challah continues to hold such special significance for us all, even in the absence of the BHM"K and through all the lands of our dispersion. Through a simple act performed in the kitchen, an ordinary loaf of bread becomes an expression of emunah, gratitude, and recognition of Hashem's presence in our daily lives.

May we merit to appreciate the blessings Hashem bestows upon us each day. May we never take our sustenance for granted, and may we always remember that while bread nourishes the body, it is Hashem Who sustains life.

And in this merit, may Hashem continue to bless Klal Yisrael with abundance, gratitude, spiritual growth, and lasting bracha. בברכת בשורות טובות, רשבת שלום, Michal

from: **Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald** <ezb@njop.org>

date: Jun 8, 2026, 3:17 PM

"The Ma'ah'peelim: Forcing Their Way into the Promised Land"

(updated and revised from Shelach 5767-2007)

by Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Shelach, we read about the מעפילים-- "Ma'ah'peelim," the ancient Israelites who tried to force their way into Canaan after G-d had decreed that the people would not enter the Promised Land.

The story is well known. Moses sends twelve distinguished leaders to scout the land of Israel. Ten of them return with a negative report, saying that Canaan is a land that devours its inhabitants, is populated by giants, and that fierce and powerful people live in fortified cities. The negative scouts warn the Israelites that Amalek dwells in the South, the Hittites, the Jebusites and the Emorites dwell on the mountain, and that the Canaanites dwell by the sea. The ten scouts then declare (Numbers 13:31): לא נוכל לעלות אל העם, כי חזק הוא ממנו, "We are not able to go up against those people [the Canaanites], for they are too strong for us!"

The entire assembly of Israel weep all night and cry out to Moses and Aaron (Number 14:2-3): "If only we had died in the land of Egypt or if only we had died in the wilderness! Why is G-d bringing us to this land to die by the sword? Our wives and young children will be taken captive! Is it not better for us to return to Egypt?"

Despite the best efforts of Joshua and Caleb (the two scouts who dissented from the negative report) to quell the rebellion and to assure the people that a good land is waiting for them, the people, in a frenzy, prepare to pelt Joshua and Caleb with stones. Only the appearance of the glory of G-d, saves them. After pleading with the Al-mighty, Moses dissuades G-d from destroying the people instantly. G-d decides that, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, all of the generation of men who had witnessed G-d's miracles in Egypt and in the wilderness will not enter the Promised Land. The Al-mighty instructs

Moses to turn away from the Promised Land, and journey with the People toward the wilderness in the direction of the Sea of Reeds.

When the people learn of the Divine decree to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, they begin to mourn deeply. They rise early in the morning, gather at the top of the mountain, and declare (Numbers 14:40): "We are ready, and we shall ascend to the place of which G-d has spoken, for we have sinned."

Moses warns the people not to transgress the word of G-d, for it will not succeed. He further admonishes them that G-d is not in their midst and that the Amalekites and the Canaanites are lying in wait to destroy them.

Despite the stern warning, scripture, in Numbers 14:44, relates: וַיַּעֲלֵמוּ לַעֲלוֹת, אֶל רֹאשׁ הַהָר, and they [the people] defiantly forced their way up the mountain, but the Ark of G-d's covenant and Moses did not move from the midst of the camp. The Amalekite and the Canaanite who dwelt on the mountain descended, and struck the People, pounding them until Hormah.

The commentators are perplexed by the severity of the punishment. Perhaps, they argue, the people (known historically as the מעפילים, "Ma'ah'peelim"), who had defiantly forced their way up the mountain toward Canaan to enter the Promised Land against G-d's will and had rallied behind the ten scouts and the evil reports, were now sincerely penitent, and regretted their previous rebelliousness, and now wished to enter Canaan with a full heart. After all, they forcefully declare, in Numbers 14:40, וְעַלֵינוּ אֵל הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר ה', "We are here, and we shall ascend to the place of which G-d has spoken, for we have sinned!"

Is it not true that the doors of repentance are never closed? If the sinners realized their mistake, why were they not forgiven? Why were they attacked so viciously by their enemies and destroyed?

Searching for an answer, our rabbis carefully study the "fine print" of Numbers 14:40. The verse does not actually state that the Israelites acknowledged their sin. In fact, it says, אֲשֶׁר אָמַר ה', כִּי הִטְאָנוּ. The people themselves are not really contrite. They merely state that G-d said about them, that they had sinned. If they themselves truly felt sinful, why did they not clearly say so themselves, rather than simply quote G-d's description of them as sinners?

Furthermore, are the people now determined to enter the land because they are really motivated by love of the land of Israel, or is it simply because G-d had now said "no" to them?

The Dubno Maggid offers a vivid parable, that cuts to the essence of the issue. It is similar, says the Maggid, to a young man from a wealthy family who was offered a choice to marry either the daughter of another wealthy man or the daughter of a rabbi. The young man actually preferred the daughter of the rabbi, but insisted that he would marry her only if her father, the rabbi, gave him many precious gifts. Otherwise, he would marry the daughter of the wealthy man.

The rabbi rejected the conditions of the young man, stating that even if the prospective groom would reconsider and renounce his demands, he would never allow his daughter to marry him. He explained his decision by saying that the young man had now shown his true colors, that he does not truly value Torah, since he is prepared to marry the daughter of a wealthy man who is an ignoramus and bereft of Torah.

Similarly, says the Maggid, when the nation of Israel heard the evil reports about the land of Israel, they declared (Numbers 14:3): "It is preferable for us to go back to Egypt." This statement clearly indicates that the people of Israel did not truly value the land of Israel. Such a generation, says G-d, does not deserve to inherit the land, even though they are now regretful, and are prepared to go to Canaan. There is no point in going to the land of Israel now, since there is no sincere commitment to the land. G-d therefore declares (Numbers 14:29): בַּמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה, יִפְּלוּ פְגָרֵיכֶם, "in this wilderness your carcasses shall fall!"

It is ironic, that the appellation "Ma'ah'peelim," has taken on an entirely new, heroic meaning in contemporary times. Despite the Nazis' unremitting efforts to murder all Jews, the British, who controlled mandatory Palestine, closed the borders of Palestine to all Jews, so as not to offend the Arab population. Refugees from Europe, desperate to escape their Nazi murderers,

during, and even after, the war, risked their lives by boarding rickety and unsafe ships like the famed "Exodus," in order to make their way illegally to the land of Israel, which was effectively blockaded by the British Navy. Hundreds of refugees lost their lives in unsuccessful attempts to reach the shores of the Promised Land. Thousands of others were intercepted. Some were sent back to die in Europe, while others were interned and arrested, both in Israel and in Cypress, where they remained until they were welcomed by the newly independent State of Israel.

The heroic efforts of the new "Mah'ah'peelim" were significantly different from the actions of their ancient counterparts. While it is true that the doors of most countries were closed to the refugees fleeing for their lives, they could still have tried a less dangerous course of action to sneak through the borders of other countries where they could hide or live. Yet they chose to risk their lives, determined to reach the shores of Palestine. In their brazen efforts, they showed their all-consuming love for the land of Israel. Israel was not their second or third choice, it was their first and only choice!

Since, by their actions, the Ma'ah'peelim demonstrated that they were with G-d--the Al-mighty was with them! He responded by opening the gates of Israel to all Jews who wanted to enter.

May the Al-mighty rekindle the passion of the Ma'ah'peelim in our hearts today, and may the ultimate redemption arrive soon, in our days.

May you be blessed.

From: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>

Sent: Thursday, June 11, 2026 8:54 PM

To: Beth Sholom Landau Bill <latemaariv@bethsholom.org>

Subject: Potomac Torah Study Center Devrei Torah for Shelach Lecha 5786

As I have indicated the past few weeks, Miriam's tzaraat, Korach's rebellion, and the departure of the Meraglim all take place the same week, between 22 and 29 Sivan in the year 2449 (second year after the Exodus). The proof of the timing is in the Torah Anthology, vol. 13, pp. 333-35. Rabbi Yitzchok Magriso, an 18th Century author from Constantinople, studied and put together information from several sections in the Torah to demonstrate this timing. Why then did the Torah place Shelach before Korach? The answer, in the same source, is to tie the stories thematically. Miriam's tzaraat is a result of Lashon Horah. The Meraglim return and speak Lashon Horah about the land of Israel, falsely claiming that the residents are giants and that the land eats its inhabitants. Shelach concludes with the mitzvah of tzitzit, and Korach uses the blue die of one string of the tzitzit as the basis of his question to Moshe whether an all blue garment also requires tzitzit.

Moshe sends leaders of the twelve tribes on a diplomatic investigation of the land of Israel. The men, all leaders of their tribes, spend forty days openly touring the land and bringing back souvenirs. These leaders of the generation of the Exodus are not spies. They interact openly with the people for more than seven weeks – their position as leaders of B'Nai Yisrael is apparent to the people of Canaan. Moshe obviously fears sending these men and what they will report back to the people. He takes one precaution, changing the name of Hosea bin Nun to Yehoshua – adding a yud (for Hashem) to the beginning of his name – so Yehoshua's name would start with yud-hey (Hashem's name).

Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org focus on connections between the story of the Meraglim and other stories in the Torah. One obvious connection is with the first war of B'Nai Yisrael, immediately after crossing the Sea of Reeds. Amalek attacks the Jews, focusing on the weakest members of the group, those at the back who have the most difficulty keeping up with the journey. Moshe has Hoshea select a group of men to do the fighting. Whenever Moshe has his arms raised, pointing toward the sky (Hashem), the Jews push back Amalek. Whenever Moshe's arms point down, Amalek pushes back the Jews. This pattern is an obvious signal that the Jews, until a few days earlier slaves for generations, have no training in fighting and could not defeat an experienced enemy army on their own. The former slaves are not doing the fighting – we only defeat Amalek

because God fights on our side. Hashem expects the Jews entering the land to remember the battle with Amalek (who live in the south of Canaan) and know that God will fight for B'Nai Yisrael. When the majority report of the Meraglim focus on the "giants" in the land and say that B'Nai Yisrael could not defeat them, Moshe and Hashem are both furious, because the Jews should know that God fights with them against Amalek and other enemies. One key question Moshe has for his diplomatic delegation is whether the land is good. When the majority report comes back that the land eats (kills) the people, Moshe and Hashem are furious. God has been promising the Jews since the days of Avraham Avinu that He would give Avraham's descendants a special land and that the land, full of milk and honey, is a very good land. In giving their report, the majority do not say that the land is good – they focus on the problems we would have defeating the Canaanites. Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz (Auckland, NZ) seconds the conclusion that the land is very, very good – because it is our home, Hashem's greatest gift to B'Nai Yisrael.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, focuses on a lesson from the Rebbe – that the majority report reflects a fear of success, not a fear of the Canaanites defeating the Jews. According to the Rebbe, the leaders cherish living in the Midbar, where they live close to Hashem, study Torah all day, eat meals from Hashem, and avoid work that living in the land would require. Rabbi Sacks' response is that the mission of B'nai Yisrael is to create a model society with human dignity and chesed for anyone in need. A model society requires land, an economy, an army, flocks, labor, and an economy.

We Jews have been fighting for Israel for nearly eighty years – much longer counting the two thousand years praying and hoping to reclaim our land and country. The price is very heavy, especially with the loss of those who have fallen from attacks by our enemies. Fortunately the brutal attacks in the past nearly three years have brought Israelis closer and encouraged many Jews and especially Israelis to increase their levels of mitzvat.

The discussions of the Meraglim from my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, from more than a quarter century ago remain vivid in my mind. Rabbi Cahan brought out many insights from this parsha, including lessons from comparing this parsha with Moshe's repetition of the story in Sefer Devarim. Connections with language and situations in various parts of the Torah continue to fascinate me after many years of study. One of our most important tasks is to understand Hashem's lessons and teach them to our children and grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom, Hannah & Alan