



## Parshas Shelach

### IT'S MAGIC YOU KNOW

The men selected to scout out the land of Israel were no ordinary men. They were chosen because they held stature among the nation – they were great people, yet they gravely erred. One of the reasons Chazal understand to have motivated their plot was that life in the desert was simple and beautiful. God did everything for them, and the people were exposed at all times to the Almighty.

They had the manna to eat, which would be sent based on worthiness and potentially taste of anything they desired. They had a wellspring that moved with the camp. They had Clouds of Glory which marked travel movements and shaded them from the harsh desert sun; and according to Midrash, flattened obstacles, cleared wild beasts, and possibly cleaned their clothing too.

The spies concluded that this was an ideal way of life and engineered a report that would get the people to clamour to stay in the wilderness.

The Sfas Emes notes that immediately afterward the story of the spies concludes, three mitzvos are revealed: separating challa, Tzitzis, and nesachim – wherein all sacrifices require additions from the mineral water  $\theta$ , among them salt and spring water.

The Sfas Emes notes that the sin of the spies was that they presumed to instruct God how things ought to be. These specific mitzvos show the flaw in their argument. God did not want us to live in the desert indefinitely, eating miraculous manna, drinking from the miraculous well, under the miraculous Clouds – the training wheels have to come off eventually.

What man is independently capable of is elevating the mundane and material into spiritual . These mitzvos capture the concept.

The manna was the bread that God sent to their doorsteps. The mitzva of challa requires that when baking a loaf of bread, a small section is set aside to remind that God is the true provider. The entire loaf is called “challa”, although the mitzva only pertains to the small bit set aside. The bread that has been planted, grown, cultivated and processed becomes more.

The Clouds surrounded sheltered them and reminded them of God’s immanence and presence. Similarly, tzitzis ensconce and shroud a person – the stated aim is to remind the wearer of all mitzvos. Physical shelter and protection become more.

The wellspring that followed them around was how they drank. Similarly, the nesachim of minerals and spring water accompanied every sacrifice. The literal translation of Korban is to draw close – things mundane as minerals become more.

God does not want to give things to us for free, as this makes them cheap. The spies presumed to know that a life devoid of physicality was perfect, but these mitzvos serve indicate otherwise.

Mankind has the potential to elevate everything into something spiritual – with just a little direction.

## FACE VALUE

Every day in Shema, the section of tzitzis is read:

וְהָיָה לָכֶם, לְצִיצֵת, וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וּזְכַרְתֶּם אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹת ה', וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם; וְלֹא-תִתּוּרוּ אַחֲרַי לְבַבְכֶם, וְאַחֲרַי עֵינֵיכֶם – You will wear these tzitzis. When you see them, you will be reminded of all God's commands; and you'll do them – and you won't stray after your hearts and eyes. (15: 39)

Beyond the obvious implication of not dwelling on inappropriate sights, the Sfas Emes notes that this mitzva is mentioned soon after the tragic incident of the spies. The juxtaposition charges us to not make that generations' mistake – וְאַחֲרַי לְבַבְכֶם, וְאַחֲרַי עֵינֵיכֶם – where eyes and hearts literally “scout”, leading astray.

The Sfas Emes analyses their error.

What if their worst fears had been confirmed, and they indeed faced a barren land, inhabited by hordes of strong, ruthless, well armed, well trained men? Would Hashem's assurances and promises have meant less than if they had no knowledge of the matter?

Certainly not. The scouting changed things from their perspective – but God certainly knew what lay ahead. This is שלח לך – for yourselves.

Taking things as they appear is a character flaw that is caused by a deficiency in faith and trust. If they had truly believed and trusted Hashem, the episode could not have taken place. They'd never have sent scouts in the first place. This why the very next following words are לִמְעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ, וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתַי – not “remind yourself” so much as “never forget” – by internalisation.

Tzitzis are said to protect a person. Perhaps by indicating that there is so much more than meets the eye – including the wearer!

A part of the tzitzis requirement is to have a thread of techeiles, a shade of blue-violet. Parenthetically, there is a lot of debate about the source of the correct type of techeiles. To illustrate the gravity of the mitzva, one opinion states that tzitzis without techeiles are not tzitzis at all!

Rav Hirsch notes that the spectrum discernible to our eye ends with the blue-violet ray – the same shade as techeiles; but additional magnitudes of light radiate unseen beyond the visible spectrum. Likewise, the blue sky is the end of the earth visible to us. Perhaps then, techeiles is the bridge that leads from the visible, physical sphere into the unseen sphere beyond. This again underlines the spies error.

Man's goal is not to strive for spirituality to the exclusion of the physical, but rather to use the physical drives as tools for human growth – note how the thread of techeiles on the tzitzis is the thread wound around the white threads to make a cord of tzitzis. This reflects the duty of the Jew to unite and elevate all available forces and tools to God's service.

The techeiles on tzitzis is the mini uniform reflecting the calling of the Jew – it should be no surprise that it is the standard colour of the Beis HaMikdash and Kohen Gadol's clothing.

The entire mitzva of tzitzis screams out that the spies could not have been more wrong. It's not what you look at that matters; but what you see. Through tzitzis, we are entreated to think bigger and become more.

## ATTENTION TO ATTITUDE

When Ahron is instructed to light the Menora, we find that the Torah emphasises something seemingly out of place:

דָּבַר, אֶל-אַהֲרֹן, וְאָמַרְתָּ, אֵלָיו: בְּהִעָלֶתְךָ, אֶת-הַנֵּרוֹת, אֶל-מוֹל פְּנֵי הַמְנוֹרָה, אֶת-הַנֵּרוֹת, אֶל-מוֹל פְּנֵי הַמְנוֹרָה, וְנִעַשׂ כֵּן, אֶהְרֹן-אֶל-מוֹל פְּנֵי הַמְנוֹרָה, כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה, אֶת-מֹשֶׁה. (8: 2-3)

Rashi notes that וְנִעַשׂ כֵּן – that the person commanded did as directed, is not regularly found in the Torah; it is assumed that when God speaks to you, you do as told. Rashi explains that it appears here to praise Ahron. The Sfas Emes takes the praise to mean that Ahron was meticulous to light the Menora every day himself, when in fact, it could have been done by any member of his family. That is to say, he retained the initial enthusiasm for the job his entire life – וְנִעַשׂ כֵּן as though that were the day he was instructed.

Later, we find this lesson lost:

וַיִּסְעוּ מֵהַר ה' דְּרֹךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים – They travelled from the mountain of God a three-day journey. (10: 33)

The Gemara in Shabbos teaches that this alludes to the Jews straying from their closeness to Hashem. They literally left where God was. Rashi notes that it was their departure from Sinai that cultivated their craving for meat – the manna was not enough. The Ramban compares their attitude to leaving Sinai to a child running out of school. They left Sinai – the place where they were exposed to God and the Torah – in excitement that the “class” was over.

The Chasam Sofer explains that had they not thrown off the yolk of Torah and fled like a child running from school, they never would have developed their infamous craving for meat. The Mishna in Avos says: “Whoever throws off the yoke of Torah, they place the yoke of drech erez upon him,”. There is a fixed amount of input that must be channeled one way or another. Derech erez here refers to physical desires.

This catalysed an unfortunate chain of events. The Jews were supposed to go straight from receiving the Torah into Eretz Yisrael. Yet, because of the attitude with which they left Mount Sinai, they developed their craving for meat. Because of their craving for meat, they were delayed for 30 days while many were lost to plague. This delay allowed the opportunity for Miriam to slander Moshe, causing a further delay of seven days while waiting for her purification. The episode of the spies followed, deduced from the juxtaposition of the episodes of Miriam next to the episode of the spies; due to which the fate of that generation was sealed. They were to die out over the course

of the next 40 years, never to reach Eretz Yisrael.

It was during that time that Moshe Rabbeinu himself was denied the opportunity to enter Eretz Yisrael because of the incident wherein he struck the rock. Had Moshe Rabbeinu entered Eretz Yisrael, there never would have been a destruction of the Holy Temple, and the ensuing exile. History would have been drastically different.

What emerges is that Judaism is not exclusively about learning Torah and doing mitzvos, regardless of one's intentions and attitude. Chovos halevavos, duties of the heart and spirit, are critical. It is because of poor attitude to how we relate to Torah and mitzvos that we find ourselves in galus to this day.

## **MATZA: POVERTY OR LIBERTY?**

There is a dichotomy regarding the Matza on Pesach. Is it poor man's bread, indicative of slavery; or is it because of the redemption, that they were freed before they had time to prepare bread?

The Sfas Emes explains that we cannot celebrate being freed from Egypt on its own; we must celebrate the fact we were enslaved as well. If we were capable of being a nation that could serve Hashem in freedom initially, we need not have been enslaved, and if we could serve Hashem in slavery, we weren't in need of rescue. So being enslaved in Egypt was a key part of the process through which we became Hashem's people. What transition took place in Egypt that created a nation capable of serving God?

The Sfas Emes goes on to explain that by being in crushing slavery, the people were far beyond their comfort zones, and pushed way past the extremes of what they thought they were capable of. This was a life lesson to the people that the arrogance and ego of man could be removed, and a person could devote his entire being to something. This was a key stage in becoming Hashem's servants – the people knew what it meant to give their all; which would not have been the same thing without the ravages of slavery.

The Sfas Emes explains that this is what all evils and adversity in life are for – they educate us about our limits, and more than that, they show us the opposite extremes to which we can aspire, attain and transcend. This is the only purpose they serve, just like Egypt. If they weren't there to help us become closer to Hashem, they would have no function, and therefore would not exist. This was the only way in people could have accepted Hashem as their King entirely; in the same way they had been entirely subjugated to Paroh, they could now subjugate themselves entirely to Hashem.

This was the critical moment the Jews were born as a nation. As we say in Shema every day: אשר הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים להיות לכם לאלוקים – “That I took you out of Egypt to be for you a God” (Bamidbar 15:41). The causation is clear – we had to have been in Egypt before, in order to be taken out, to become everything we were meant to be. Being God's people hinges on the need to have subdued arrogance and ego.

This is what טוב אחרית הדבר מראשיתו means – “the end is better than the beginning” (Koheles 7:8). It was far from pleasant to be in Egypt, but what followed was receiving the Torah. The Sfas Emes tells us that our celebration of leaving Egypt must hinge around the fact that we became better once we left – we accepted Hashem as our King and our God, and we received the Torah. The first thing we did on being freed was for Hashem – this is why there is a concept of firsts going to Hashem, for example the korban Omer (and Pidyon haBen, bikkurim etc). This is what is so vital on Seder night, to relive the Exodus from Egypt. It is when we became God's people.

The Sfas Emes answers that this is why Matza correlates to both slavery as well as freedom – it is devoid of the ego,

exemplified by chametz, yet it also correlates to the freedom – the process of freedom started when we were slaves. It is how we became truly free to serve Hashem. Our freedom stems from having not been free once.

## DUMBSTRUCK

When introducing the story of Miriam, Rashi notes that it is juxtaposed with the story of the spies speaking ill of the land because the spies saw what had happened to Miriam, yet failed to learn a lesson about evil speech.

The association is bizarre, and very problematic as a source for the lesson of not speaking negatively. Miriam spoke out against a human being – and the greatest to walk this earth to boot. Why would they apply the lesson to insentient, inanimate land?

The Rambam teaches that the greater a person is, the greater exercise of humility required. The character appraisal the Torah gives of Moshe is emphatic:

והאיש משה עניו מאד מכל אדם אשר על פני האדמה – Moshe was more humble than any person on the face of the earth.

This may seem a little bit hyperbolic – but actually, indicates his level of humility – he made himself impervious to personal sensitivity – like the ground.

The lesson they could have taken on is suddenly not bizarre at all. They ought to have taken heed that Miriam spoke ill of someone who was totally detached, and genuinely did not care – not only did he completely forgive her, he immediately prayed for her recovery. This being the case, we are able to grasp the juxtaposition of the two events.

There is a phenomenally difficult, but very important lesson about sensitivity in speech here. In both cases, the error in speech was much more subtle than a straightforward, nasty piece of gossip. Yet Tisha B'Av and all tragedies in Jewish history have since ensued as a consequence.

That the level required here is beyond us may be a valid observation, but think of the reverse; what with how powerful our speech clearly is, what could be achieved with dedication and perseverance?

## PERSONAL AGENDAS

The spies returned from their expedition on the 9th of Av, culminating in what became the crucible and precursor of Jewish tragedy. The Gemara in Taanis teaches that when the Jews began to cry at the “reports” of what they were heading towards, Hashem pledged that the calendar date would be designated for genuine reasons to cry, for all generations.

Moshe sensed that they would plot some kind of scheme – evidenced by the foresight to change his disciple’s name and pray for him:

אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח מֹשֶׁה לְתוֹר אֶת הָאָרֶץ וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְהוֹשֵׁעַ בֶּן נּוֹן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ – These are the names of the men Moshe sent to scout the Land. Moshe called Hoshea, son of Nun, “Yehoshua”. (13: 16)

The people who were sent were not the average rank and file; they were leaders of their respective Tribes – senior members in the camp. The Zohar says that what motivated them to exaggerate was the fear of losing their positions and office on entry into Israel. The perceived threat distorted their perception of Israel, and everything they saw

was cast under a negative shadow.

This poses a difficulty. Note that when Eldad and Medad started prophesying that Yehoshua would take up the leadership, Yehoshua exclaimed that they should be imprisoned – he was furious at the mere suggestion that he would become leader.

If the spies false reports were predicated on a desire to lead, and Yehoshua had no interest in leading the Jews, then he would not lie to preserve the status quo. So what danger was he in, that Moshe changed his name and prayed for his well-being?

The Kozhnutzer Maggid explains that whilst Moshe intuited that the spies may manipulate what they saw out of a desire to retain their position, he was equally concerned that Yehoshua would see things the way they did for the opposite reason; Yehoshua might try to delay entry into Israel, to avoid Moshe's death and his own resultant rise to leadership. His humility could be his undoing!

It doesn't take too much to notice that negative traits cloud perceptions, and murk clarity, decisions and outlook. But perhaps positive traits can be equally harmful if imbalanced. The idea that a person can also be affected negatively by a positive characteristic is counterintuitive – and therefore frightening.

An agenda is an agenda, no matter how altruistic the underlying motivation may be. If a person's traits – whether humility, kindness, love of peace – create a preconceived parameter of how something out to transpire, then their vision is clouded, and facts will be perceived out of context. There is a figure of speech “rose-tinted spectacles...”. People often say “Personal interest aside...”, under the impression that such a thing can be done – but the Torah teaches that this is not so:

לֹא תִקַּח שוּבָח כִּי הַשְׁחָד יְעוּר עֵינֵי חֲכָמִים וְיִסְלַף דְּבָרֵי צְדִיקִים – you shall not accept a bribe, for bribery blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts just words.” (Devarim 16: 19).

The bribe referenced is not necessarily cash – the Torah takes injury not at the bribe itself, but the result. Anything that clouds an objective view of reality, whatever “blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts just words,” is called a bribe.

R' Yissocher Frand notes that a person with perfect vision still won't be able to see through frosted glass. Similarly, an agenda, even as noble as keeping Moshe Rabbeinu in power, could distort reality.

If Yehoshua was susceptible to error due to personal agenda, it speaks volumes of us. But avoiding it is as simple as following Yehoshua's lead – his teacher's foresight saved him from succumbing to sin.

The Mishna in Avos (1: 6) says: עֲשֵׂה לְךָ רֵב, וְקַנָּה לְךָ חֵבֵר – Assume for yourself a master, acquire for yourself a friend. We are enjoined to seek out a teacher or friend who sees through ourselves and our self-interest.

Someone who can analyse and break down something complicated into its components is a worthwhile person to have around. They will remove many pitfalls.

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