

+++++

**The Lower East Side
Parshat HaShavua sheet**

*A collection of Divrei Torah
from around the Internet*

+++++

=====

Parshat Shlach

=====

Latest time for Kriyat Shema – 9:13

A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

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

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

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

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

The Steipler Gaon, Rabbi Yisrael Yaakov Kanievsky, in his classic work on chumash, Birchas Peretz explains that poor attitudes help forge opinions that are diametric to the truth. The Talmud tells us that, "Man is led in the path that he chooses to travel!" Imagine. The spies see these giants wailing and weeping at massive funerals day after day. They should have figured that this plague was an anomaly, for if this was the norm, then the funerals would have become part of their everyday existence, and hardly an event worthy of disrupting their normally tight security.

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

Elevating the Physical World

By Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

One of the main characters in the Torah portion is Yehoshua. Yehoshua was most significantly influenced by two great people – his righteous ancestor, Yosef, and his great teacher, Moshe.

Yehoshua emulated Yosef in a number of ways. In particular they shared the ability to be involved with and elevate the physical world. In this article, we will examine some of the sources that focus on this aspect of Yosef and Yehoshua and contrast them to Moshe Rabbeinu.

One of the main facets of Yosef's greatness was his ability to be involved in the physical world and maintain his lofty spiritual levels despite great challenges. Likewise, his role was clearly very much related to the physical realm. As he himself told his brothers, the whole reason that he was brought down to Egypt was to provide food in the midst of the devastating famine that struck the world. Moreover, he made the Egyptian people undergo circumcision. One of the reasons given for why he did this is that circumcision represents the elevation of the physical aspect of the body. Thus, his goal in doing this was to elevate the spiritual level of the Egyptian nation.

Moshe, in contrast, was so spiritual that he resembled an angel in many aspects: He attained the highest level of prophecy possible and spent 40 days on Mount Sinai without food or drink. When he came down, his face shone so brightly that no one could even look at him. Moreover, he was on such a level of prophecy that he was forbidden from engaging in regular physical activities.

Yehoshua, the loyal student of Moshe, resembled his ancestor Yosef more than his teacher. We see this both in the Torah and the Prophets. In *Beshalach*, Amalek attacks the Jewish nation. Moshe tells Yehoshua to go out and lead the physical battle, whilst Moshe stays behind praying for the nation's success. Thus, Moshe engaged in the spiritual realm of the battle, whilst Yehoshua's role was more in the physical sphere.

In the Book of the Prophets, this theme continued: The nation suffers its first defeat in the battle of Ai. When Yehoshua hears about what had happened, he falls to the ground and supplicates in prayer to God over the tragedy. However, God reacts sharply, telling him, "Yehoshua, get up, why do you fall on your face?!" He then instructs Yehoshua to take an active role in finding out the cause of the disaster. Upon Yehoshua's taking a more physically active role, God's anger is abated.

The Shem MiShmuel takes the contrast between Moshe and Yehoshua further, saying that God's way of relating to the nation altered drastically with the change of leadership. He brings out this idea in answering a difficult problem. In this week's portion, the nation demonstrates its fear of entering the land of Israel and the people therefore ask Moshe to send spies to the land. The Shem MiShmuel asks why they were so fearful – they had experienced numerous open miracles and seen how God could destroy Egypt, the most powerful empire in the world.

He explains that the key event which triggered their fears was the prophecy of Eldad and Medad in the desert. They prophesied that Moshe would die and Yehoshua would lead the nation into Eretz Yisrael. The people knew that the open miracles they were experiencing were in the merit of Moshe. They also realized that despite his greatness, Yehoshua could not guide the nation to this level of open Divine Providence. Rather they would be largely restricted to hidden miracles. This is why they were so fearful of entering the land - they felt that only open miracles would enable them to conquer the mighty nations living there.

Thus, we see that Yehoshua was more grounded in the physical world than Moshe. His greatness was that he could attain great spiritual heights for himself and the nation through his physical efforts. Like Yosef he also led a mass circumcision, thereby elevating the physical nature of the people. And he led the nation on its difficult transition from living above the laws of nature to living within them and yet maintaining high levels of holiness.

There is a remarkable Midrash which reveals how great Yehoshua's mastery was over the physical world, and how he inherited this power from Yosef: In his war against the Emorites, Yehoshua needed more daylight in order to complete the victory. He commanded the sun and moon to stand still to give him that extra time, and the sun complied. The Midrash elaborates on how Yehoshua was able to bring about this remarkable miracle. "Rebbe Yitzchak says, he [Yehoshua] said to it [the sun], 'bad servant, aren't you a servant of my father [Yosef] – didn't he see you in a dream: "And behold, the sun and the moon were bowing." Immediately the sun and moon stood still.'"

This Midrash teaches us that when Yosef saw the sun and moon bow down to him it was not merely that they represented his father and mother subjugating themselves to him. On a deeper level it meant that the mightiest physical entities were subjugated to Yosef. This power was inherited by Yehoshua and he was also able to make them break their nature.

It is important to note that despite his natural connection to Yosef, Yehoshua had to earn this exalted level of controlling the physical world. How did he do this? In the Torah portion of Pinchas, God instructs Moshe to appoint Yehoshua as his successor. The Midrash explains His choice: “He would come early to, and leave late from, your study hall and would arrange the benches and cover the tables.”

This teaches us that Yehoshua had an incredible dedication to Torah; he learnt it with great diligence and he even ‘lowered’ himself to facilitate the Torah of others. Through this dedication, he was able to take his inheritance from Yosef and apply it to guiding the Jewish people in both the spiritual and physical realms.

Obviously, both Moshe and Yehoshua achieved unfathomable levels of greatness, but in some ways, it seems that Yehoshua’s strengths are more possible to emulate on some level than those of Moshe, given Yehoshua’s greater involvement in the physical world. We learn from him that we can be involved in physicality and yet strive to elevate it to bring us and others closer to God.

Our Unique Relationship With Eretz Yisrael

By Rabbi Yaakov Abramovitz

Parshas Sh’lach is a good opportunity to reaffirm our special connection with *Eretz Yisrael*. After all, it was this core value that the 10 *meraglim* (spies) nefariously convinced the nation to reject. Before unleashing their terrible lies about the Land, the spies began their report with a seemingly innocuous statement. “*We came to the land to which you sent us, and it also is flowing with milk and honey*” (*Bamidbar 13:27*). This may sound like a compliment at first glance, but take note of the word “also” - what does it imply?

The truth is, the spies intended severe damage with this description by denying that *Eretz Yisrael* was distinctive. Surrounded by an audience of people desperate to return to Egypt, the *meraglim* announced that their planned destination was no better than the previous “*land flowing with milk and honey*” (see *16:13*). *Mitzrayim* had been nice, and yes, *Eretz Yisrael* is “also” nice, maybe even somewhat inferior (*Oznayim LaTorah*). Even their praise was laden with rejection of the notion that Hashem’s chosen land was unique in any way.

To challenge this assertion of their fellow agents, Calev and Yehoshua countered that *Eretz Yisrael* was not just “another” fruitful land; it was beyond comparison. “*The land we passed through to scout is a very very good land*” (*14:7*). With the repetition of the word “very,” they registered their outrage that Hashem’s promised land was being equated to Egypt or any other location. The Land of Israel is not “also” flowing with milk and honey - it is the only such place in the world (*Ohr HaChayim*, v. 8).

Chaim Weizmann, the first president of the State of Israel, was once asked by a British minister, “Why do the Jewish people stubbornly insist on the heavily contested Land of Israel? Wouldn’t it be easier to simply pursue a new homeland, one with much less resistance?” The Zionist leader replied, “I can ask you the very same question. You expend many hours of travel with every visit to your elderly parents; but why bother with such a hassle? Surely there are plenty of old couples who live much closer to your home - perhaps even within walking distance!” Faced with the minister’s stunned silence, the former president concluded, “Obviously, you could never replace your beloved parents with a pair of strangers, regardless of how much easier it would make your life. And the same is true of our emotional bond with Israel. There is too much personal history to replace it with a stranger!”

It is astounding how little has changed over the last 75 years - and in the last 3,300 years, for that matter. In every generation, there are those who rise up to question and threaten the Jewish people’s familial relationship with *Eretz Yisrael*. Some do it with *lashon hara*, others with rockets, and many under the guise of humanitarian efforts. It is critical to actively stand with Israel, the way we would stand by family. This is not just another piece of land. It is our only home.

“Send out for yourself men who will scout the Land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Children of Israel. You shall send one man each for his father's tribe; each one shall be a chieftain in their midst” (13:2)

The Midrash explains that the story of Miriam's lashon hara and subsequent punishment immediately precedes the story of the spies because Hashem foresaw the mistake of the spies and wanted to warn them about the punishment of lashon hara. Hashem did not want them to claim that they were unaware of the harsh punishment for lashon hara and so He held up Miriam as an example to them before they even planned to set out. Nevertheless they did not pay any heed. Many times, Hashem does a kindness for us by sending us an event from which we can learn a lesson before that particular lesson is relevant to our own lives. We must be aware of this gift and look the events in our lives and in the world around us with the realization that what we see today is a message for tomorrow. The spies were supposed to understand that there was a connection between the event that they had just witnessed and what they were experiencing in Eretz Yisrael, to learn from yesterday's situation to address today's challenges.

“Moshe sent them from the wilderness of Paran according to the commandment of Hashem; all of them men who were heads of the Children of Israel” (13:3)

The spies were great men, leaders of their tribes who had been handpicked by Moshe Rabbeinu to represent the people on this very important scouting mission. But they did not remain great people. They fell very quickly and committed a terrible sin with their negative report. This teaches us a lesson about the importance of continuing to work on ourselves no matter how much we have grown. The yetzer hara is always trying to bring people down and the only way to ensure that we can retain the growth that we have experience is to constantly work on reaching even greater heights. We learn from our parsha that even the greatest can fall. A person who is great today has no guarantee that he will continue. Instead of going into autopilot, we have to keep working hard to remain close to Hashem.

“These are the names of the men whom Moshe sent to spy out the land. Moshe called Hoshea son of Nun ‘Yehoshua’” (13:16)

Why was Yehoshua the only spy who received a new name from Moshe for special protection? We know that the Torah does not allow parents to show favoritism to any one child and teachers are not supposed to favor a single student. Why did Yehoshua get special treatment? The Meshech Chochma says that Yehoshua was the general who had defeated Amalek, one of the nations inhabiting Eretz Yisrael, in battle. If he would come back and express his fear of Amalek and the other nations there, everyone would be afraid. After all, if Yehoshua, the courageous general who had seen them once and defeated them, was afraid, then certainly there was reason for fear. It was therefore extremely important that Yehoshua, more so than the other spies, should remain strong. Moshe hoped that under his influence, the spies would bring back a positive report. By giving Yehoshua a new name and praying for his protection, Moshe Rabbeinu taught us the lesson of foresight. It is important to look ahead and prepare for situations that lie ahead of us rather than taking the approach of “I'll deal with it when I get there.” Without proper preparation, one minimizes his chances of success.

“This shall be fringes for you, and when you see it, you will remember all the commandments of Hashem to perform them, and you shall not wander after your hearts and after your eyes after which you are going astray” (15:39)

The Midrash Tanchuma explains the mitzvah of tzitzis with the following parable: There was once a man drowning at sea. A boat came to rescue him and the sailor tossed a rope down into the water. He called out to the man sinking in the water that he must hold on to the rope if he wanted to have any hope of survival.

This story is an allegory for our existence in this world. The physical desires and temptations around us are constantly weighing us down and threaten to sink us. Hashem gave us mitzvos so that we can hold on to them as a means of keeping ourselves afloat. Without them, there is no way that we can withstand the dangers to our souls. The Torah tells us that the strings of the tzitzis are meant to remind us of Hashem's mitzvos and one way that they accomplish this function is because the strings are reminiscent of the rope in the allegory. They remind us that mitzvos are our lifeline in this world. The only way to preserve our spiritual health is by holding on tightly to them and taking advantage of every mitzvah opportunity. This is the idea that we are supposed to have in mind when we look at our tzitzis. Then they will prevent us from following the desires of our hearts and our eyes, as the Torah promises. There are people who neglect this mitzvah and do not wear tzitzis, justifying it by pointing out that one is only obligated in this mitzvah if he is wearing a four-cornered garment. This may be true, but one who does not wear tzitzis is missing out on this vital reminder and source of protection that every man needs to counteract the difficult temptations that surround us.

By Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Challah: The Breadwinner

By Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene

The Mitzva: When kneading a sizeable dough of the five main types of grain (wheat, barley, rye, spelt and oats), a portion of challah was first separated as tithes to the Kohen before the bread was eaten (Bamidbar 15:19-21). (Today, the separation of challah is performed but burnt).

The fruit from the field can be eaten immediately. The production of bread, however, necessitates an elaborate series of activities including threshing, winnowing, grinding, kneading, and baking. Still, a portion of dough is first set aside to G-d before man partakes of it.

Bread is the mainstay of man's diet. Bread, that is not the foodstuff of animals, magnificently embodies the uniqueness of humanity. In fact, there are some remarkable parallels illustrating the affinity between "bread" and "man".

Only man has to work as a "breadwinner" with backbreaking labor. Actually, this toil was as a direct consequence of man misusing his bechira, "free will" and the repercussions of Adam's sin, eating of the Tree of Knowledge, which according to one opinion was of wheat (Berachos 40a). Adam feared "shall I and my donkey eat out of the same trough?" (Pesachim 118a) but his fears were allayed when G-d declared to him "*with the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread*" (Bereishis 3:19).

The sophisticated manufacture of bread, despite its elongated process, affirms man's superior intelligence. When his actions are holy and directed to G-d, he is rightly crowned the "king" over the other creatures of this world. However, were he to sin, he plummets from his position and loses this title. Adam was rightly concerned lest he degenerate to the lowly level of an animal, to indulge in animalistic behavior.

In his formation on the Sixth Day of Creation, Adam's body was "kneaded [like a dough] from the [earth of the] ground" (Sanhedrin 38b) into which G-d implanted a divine "soul" to elevate and uplift him from a purely materialistic existence. In-other-words, Adam's curious description of the "challah of the world" (Bereishis Rabbah 14:1) points at his exalted status that rests upon his ability to sanctify himself and the world around him just as the portion of challah is sanctified to G-d before partaking of the rest of the bread.

It is true that this task "*with the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread*" would require wrestling the stubborn earth to elicit the latent holiness within. But do this he must – until he can declare G-d in the universe as evident within the blessing on bread produced by man, proclaiming G-d with the words: "*hamotzei lechem min ha'aretz*, the One who brings forth bread from the ground" (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 167:2).

It is appropriate how, like man as king over the creatures, bread is similarly elevated above everything else.

Bread is itself a symbol of kingship. When Boaz gave Ruth "bread" (Ruth 2:14) he symbolized how she was deserving of siring kings (Shabbos 113b). It is not coincidental that King David, descendant of Ruth, came from "Beis Lechem" (Bethlehem) that literally translates as "House of Bread". The most prominent and "king" of all foods, bread has a separate blessing of its own. It is the basis of the meal (breaking bread) which is typically eaten first and afterwards there is the biblical obligation to recite "*birchas hamazon*, blessing after the Meal".

This, then, provides an additional dimension of the symbolism of challah. Lest man forget how he is the "challah" and "king" over the lower world, his diet is distinctive to that of the other beasts.

His goal is to always be the "breadwinner": to grapple with the "ground" and to bring forth its "bread" and spend his energies to ensure the sanctification of G-d in the world.

The Land's Blessing

by Shlomo Katz

Most of this week's parsha relates the story of the Spies that Bnei Yisrael sent to examine Eretz Yisrael and the tragic aftermath of that excursion. Afterwards, the Torah teaches the mitzvah of Challah / giving a kohen a portion of each dough that one kneads. The Torah says (15:19, 21): "It shall be that when you will eat of the bread of the Land, you shall set aside a portion for Hashem. . . From the first of your kneading you shall give a portion to Hashem, for your generations."

Why, asked R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l is this mitzvah taught in this parashah? Why is it not mentioned in next week's parashah together with the other produce-related, Eretz Yisrael-dependent laws, such as Terumah?

R' Soloveitchik's answer is quoted as follows: The commandment to separate Challah is different from Mitzvot such as Terumah and Ma'aser in that the latter apply to the produce of Eretz Yisrael wherever the produce may be, while the former applies to a dough kneaded in Eretz Yisrael regardless of where the wheat grew. [Ed. note: By rabbinic decree, Challah is separated even in the Diaspora.] Terumah and Ma'aser are indicative of the intrinsic holiness of Eretz Yisrael and of the blessing attributable to the Land itself. Not so Challah. That mitzvah is a reminder of G-d's blessing that rests on the handiwork of the residents of Eretz Yisrael.

The mitzvah of Challah belongs specifically after the episode of the Spies, for their very doubt was whether Bnei Yisrael were strong enough to conquer and inhabit the Land. In the context of those doubts, the Torah teaches that the efforts of those who inhabit the Land are blessed.

We Will Go Up

By Rabbi Berel Wein

The disaster that befell the Jewish people in the desert and that doomed the generation that had left Egypt and stood at Sinai had many causes. But to me, the most blatant cause was that Moshe somehow picked the wrong men to be the spies that would report on the Land of Israel. They were, in the words of the Torah and Rashi's commentary to those words, great men, leaders of Israel, people of piety and belief. Moshe was supremely confident that they would be enthusiastic about the blessings of living in the land of Israel. Yet, with the exceptions of Calev and Yehoshua, these leaders got the facts right and the conclusions all wrong.

The rabbis of the Midrash indicate that they had a personal agenda that drove them, perhaps existing even only subconsciously within them - that they were afraid of losing their leadership roles to younger people of the next generation when the Jews would enter the Land of Israel. But I feel that one can see a deeper reason and psychological insight as well. The Land of Israel has always been a difficult test for Jews. It is much easier to deal with an imaginary place - a Holy Land - where everything will be perfect and satisfying than to be forced to contend with a real place where life is far from perfect and where ideals are difficult to realize. The spies were disappointed in what they saw, in the reality of the land as compared to their imaginary perfect home and this disparity depressed them and colored their report to the rest of their compatriots. The Jerusalem on this earth never quite matches up with the heavenly Jerusalem of our dreams. And the inability to deal with this truth became a main cause of tragedy for the ten spies and for those who believed in them.

Calev and Yehoshua were not discouraged by the reality of the land as they saw it. They said: "aloh naaleh" - we will go up, we will improve the situation, and we will not forsake our dreams and ideals because of the difficulties that the land poses. We will make it better and be able to succeed. Living in Israel as I do, I often hear, especially from those Jews who still reside in the Diaspora - many of them pious, observant, fine people, comments about the imperfections of our state and of its populace. It almost seems to serve as an excuse to remain in the desert and not to come to Israel because of the difficulties involved. I make no excuses for the failings in Israeli life, be they religious, educational, social or economic. Nevertheless, one need only look at the achievements that have been wrought here over the past century of Jewish life in order to be heartened.

The Land of Israel poses now, as it always has, a severe test of Jewish faith, loyalty and commitment. What is necessary is for all of us to possess the optimism and fortitude of Calev and Yehoshua in viewing the Land of Israel and the Jewish community residing therein. We will certainly go up, we will improve, and we will strive to fulfill our goal and ideal of being a special people living in a special land. In so doing, we will realize the goal of a holy people residing in a holy land.