

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet
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THE SPOKEN WORD :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Speeches by world and national leaders occupy a great deal of our attention these days. The United States has for the first time in decades (since perhaps Ronald Reagan) a true orator in Barack Obama. His speeches were a vital part of his campaign for the presidency and in the words of Theodore Roosevelt he uses his office as "a bully pulpit" effectively and constantly.

Perhaps since the days of Franklin Roosevelt, no president has presented himself as so effective a communicator as has Obama. And he has been able to do so in spite of the prevailing 30 second sound-bite that shackles almost all other political leaders.

In a frightening way much of what is happening in today's world is reminiscent of the decade of the 1930's. Growing anti-Semitism, war weariness, economic crisis, a lack of confidence in governments and systems, fearsome weapons of war, constant "little wars," declining empires and emerging powers, are all eerily familiar reminders to us of the world scene that existed nearly eighty years ago.

And at that time, the spoken word, amplified through radio, came to be the source of confrontation, inspiration, hope and despair. In Germany, Hitler's strident voice and demonic speeches hypnotized a whole country into believing that it was a master race and therefore entitled to conquer, rule, destroy and annihilate those it deemed inferior.

Franklin Roosevelt's voice gave Americans hope but no fireside chat by itself could cure the ills of the Great Depression. Mussolini strutted on a balcony and proclaimed the rebirth of the Roman Empire and most Italians originally took him seriously. Winston Churchill warned darkly and accurately of the coming Armageddon with his matchless prose and distinctive oratory. The spoken word was in vogue.

I would imagine that Binyamin Netanyahu's speech (which I have not heard since this brilliant article is being written early on Sunday morning) will also contain fine oratory but will not really satisfy the Palestinians, the American government, the members of his coalition, the European Union or many Israelis. But it is important that such a speech be given for Israel cannot abandon the spoken word to our enemies and detractors.

None of the Israeli prime ministers has really been an effective orator and that has been a defect in our generally ineffective public relations presentations. Netanyahu is the best speaker of the lot, both in Hebrew and certainly in English.

A clear statement of Israel's goals and policies and a rousing defense of our security measures would certainly be of great domestic and international importance. The great messages of the prophets of Israel were delivered orally to the people and only later were they reduced to writing. It is not accidental that the Lord gave us the Oral Law together with the written Torah in order to complete His message to us.

The spoken word has great power. The Torah is completely dependent upon the Oral Law and its continued development over the generations for understanding and being able to meet the challenges of different times and places. The nuances of the human voice tell us a great deal, insights that more often than not cannot be expressed simply by the written word.

My great teacher and mentor Rabbi Chaim Kreiswirth of blessed memory told me often that the greatest weapon that a rabbi has in one's arsenal is the spoken word. Much of what contributed to the secularization of Eastern European Jewry in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was the silence of the rabbinic leaders of the time.

Rabbis that only spoke publicly a few times a year and then in a very scholarly fashion were unable to rouse the masses of Jews to the cause of tradition. The Left and the secularists abounded with orators whose message, false and misleading as it eventually turned out to be, was heard and believed.

Our enemies speak in a loud voice while we confine ourselves to cold and dispassionate press releases. The Lord continually orders Moshe to speak

to the Jewish people. The Talmud taught us the principle that silence is capable of being interpreted as admittance.

Especially in our world of instant world-wide communication the ability to speak clearly and well and to articulate a meaningful Jewish message is of crucial and vital importance. Our schools should emphasize public speaking not as an elective but as a required course. We can avoid the disasters of the twentieth century only if we are able to impress others with our views through our spoken words.

Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: SHLACH :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Moshe had a good idea to encourage the Jewish people to appreciate the gift being granted to them in possessing the Land of Israel. With the most positive of intentions he commissions twelve leaders of Israel, in whom he undoubtedly had unquestioned trust in their piety and wisdom, Moshe expects them to return with an enthusiastic assessment of the Land of Israel.

Instead they return with an even-handed cold blooded report about the land and its inhabitants. Like Obama's speech, the negative parts of their report somehow overwhelm the positive statements that they uttered. They eventually back up their report with personal agendas, woeful predictions and demagogic pronouncements. And Moshe is powerless to tell the people to reject the negative report.

A mood of wild depression overwhelms Israel and the great march to the promised land is ended permanently for that generation. There was always a predisposition among that generation to prefer to return to Egyptian servitude rather than to forge a new society in a new land and create their own independent state.

The uncomfortable but known past always has strong attraction and requires no special bravery or courage. However, the unknown future no matter how great its possibilities are is always an intimidating sight. This attitude is present in all Jewish and human generations and certainly was not limited to the generation of the Jews in the desert of Sinai. It is the unknown future that always destabilizes present wisdom and judgment. Moshe's assurances of Godly support for Israel fall on unhearing ears.

The question arises as to why Moshe who was able to convince Israel to leave Egypt, march through the desert, accept the yoke of the Torah, reject the Golden Calf, build the Mishkan/tabernacle, etc. was unable to convince them of the importance of the Land of Israel to their physical and spiritual development.

Over the centuries the great commentators to the Torah have dealt with this issue, each in their own way. But the basic underlying assessment of the issue is that there is a hesitation if not even a fear of Jewish independence and self-government among the Jewish people. This is certainly reflected throughout large sections of the Jewish world today. This attitude is always cloaked in theological niceties and pious nostrums as well as an unfounded belief in the Western humanitarian values of much of Europe and America. But the harsh truth is that most Jews find it easier and more comfortable to live under foreign rule than to have to build their own self-governing society and nation. The exile mentality of the Jewish people, formed already in Egyptian bondage over three millennia ago, remains part of our DNA even today.

The Jewish State is spoken of as a place of refuge and escape for persecuted Jews. But a Jewish State is really much more than that. It is a challenge and a work in progress. It should not be viewed as merely a haven for the helpless but rather as a country that must eventually fulfill its role as a light unto the rest of humankind. Again, the Torah of Moshe must convince us of our true role in the world.

Shabat shalom.

At the insistence of Bnei Yisrael, and with G-d's permission, Moshe sends 12 scouts, one from each tribe, to reconnoiter Canaan. Anticipating trouble, Moshe changes Hoshea's name to Yehoshua, expressing a prayer that G-d not let him fail in his mission. They return 40 days later, carrying unusually large fruit. When 10 of the 12 state that the people in Canaan are as formidable as the fruit, the men are discouraged. Calev and Yehoshua, the only two scouts still in favor of the invasion, try to bolster the people's spirit. The nation, however, decides that the Land is not worth the potentially fatal risks, and instead demands a return to Egypt. Moshe's fervent prayers save the nation from Heavenly annihilation. However, G-d declares that they must remain in the desert for 40 years until the men who wept at the scouts' false report pass away. A remorseful group rashly begins an invasion of the Land based on G-d's original command. Moshe warns them not to proceed, but they ignore this and are massacred by the Amalekites and Canaanites. G-d instructs Moshe concerning the offerings to be made when Bnei Yisrael will finally enter the Land. The people are commanded to remove challa, a gift for the kohanim, from their dough. The laws for an offering after an inadvertent sin, for an individual or a group, are explained. However, should someone blaspheme against G-d and be unrepentant, he will be cut off spiritually from his people. One man is found gathering wood on public property in violation of the laws of Shabbat and he is executed. The laws of tzitzit are taught. We recite the section about the tzitzit twice a day to remind ourselves of the Exodus.

Insights

Cognitive Dissonance

"Send forth" (13:2)

Psychology recognizes a syndrome called "cognitive dissonance". CD is a kind of armor that we build up to ward off information that we don't want to hear. According to cognitive dissonance theory we seek consistency among our beliefs. When there is dissonance between belief and behavior we change something to eliminate the dissonance. We could change our behavior to accord with our beliefs, but usually we change our attitude to accommodate our behavior. It's much less work.

For example, you buy an expensive car and take it for a drive up the coast. Even though the car looked great in the showroom and handled well in town you discover that on long drives it's about as comfortable as a wooden bench. Dissonance exists between your beliefs that you have a) bought a good car, and b) that a good car should be comfortable. Dissonance could be eliminated by deciding that it doesn't matter since the car is mainly used for short trips (reducing the importance of the dissonant belief) or focusing on the car's strengths such as safety, appearance, handling (thereby adding more consonant beliefs). Getting rid of the car could also eliminate the dissonance, but that's a lot harder than changing beliefs.

In the second year after the Jewish People left Egypt Moshe sent out spies on a reconnaissance mission to the Land of Canaan. The spies left on the 27th of Sivan and returned on the 9th of Av. When they returned they brought with them a frightening and distorted picture of the Land. This led to a national catastrophe. The Jewish People rejected the Land of Israel. G-d punished them severely, barring them from the Land for forty years until that generation had passed away. Most of the journey of the spies was during the month of Tammuz. What is the link between Tammuz and the spies? Another question is how could these men of great spiritual stature, leaders of the tribes, have made such a mistake?

In the desert the Jewish People lived a miraculous existence. Their food descended from Heaven. Supernatural clouds flattened the terrain and shielded them from the elements. All this would cease with the crossing of the Jordan River.

When the spies looked at the Land of Israel they didn't just see valleys and mountains. They didn't just see a land flowing with milk and honey. They saw a way of life coming to an end. Maybe this new world would need new kinds of leaders. They started to see themselves as the ancien regime.

Yesterday's Men. They looked at the Land and saw in it much more than trees and shrubs, sky and lakes.

The beginning of cognitive dissonance stirred within them. On the one hand this was the Land that G-d had promised to their forefathers. And yet the promise of the Land spelled an end to everything that was familiar and comfortable to them. Faced with such a dilemma they had two alternatives: Either to accept a change in their behavior that the new Land might mandate or to remove the dissonance between their fears and the virtues of the Land by minimizing the Land's virtues and fabricating its failings.

The power of habit proved too strong. They preferred to cling to their ingrained behavior patterns, and change instead their opinions about the Land.

The month of Tammuz is connected to the power of sight. Each of the twelve months of the year corresponds to one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Tammuz corresponds to the tribe of Reuven. Reuven comes from the same word in Hebrew as sight.

What is the connection between seeing and Tammuz?

Cancer the Crab symbolizes the month of Tammuz. Crabs have compound eyes consisting of several thousand optical units. The crab perceives reality through thousands of different channels. Reality is fragmented into thousands of individual pictures. The eye of the crab is a symbol of the eye's ability to interpret reality according to the bias of the viewer, where reality can be seen a thousand different ways.

The crab's eyes are on stalks that can be lowered for protection into sockets on the carapace. In other words, the crab can retract its power of sight. It can withdraw from the world of what exists and confine its sight to a dark interior world. A world where it sees only itself locked in blackness.

This is what the spies did. They projected their own fears onto reality and turned it into a nightmare world of their own invention.

Penim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Shelach

Send forth men, if you please, and let them spy out the land of Canaan. (13:2)

The episode of the meraglim, spies, left a tragic blemish on Klal Yisrael's journey toward the Holy Land. Indeed, as a result of their misdeeds and the people's reaction, they were all condemned to perishing in the wilderness, never to step foot into the Promised Land. Clearly, this was a sin of epic proportion - but why? What really was the sin that engendered such a punishment? In Sefer Devarim, Moshe Rabbeinu reiterates the story of how the people approached him in unison requesting that he send spies to reconnoiter Eretz Yisrael. If it was such a bad thing, why did Moshe send them? Apparently, he presaged something ominous for the future, when he said to Yeshoshua, "Hashem should save you from the counsel of the meraglim." (Rashi citing the Talmud Sotah 34b) Furthermore, it appears that Hashem was sending them. If it had been doomed from the start, Hashem could have indicated that the mission was not something that found favor in His eyes. He did not. Why?

The Midrash Rabbah (16:1) distinguishes between the shlichus, mission, of Moshe's agents and that of the two spies sent by Yehoshua. Pinchas and Calev, the two agents sent by Yehoshua, epitomized mesiras nefesh, dedication to the point of self-sacrifice. Hence, they merited salvation. Moshe's agents were considered wicked from the start and were, thus, punished. The Midrash seems to base its distinction on the approach of each to the mission on which they were sent. In contrast, every commentator feels that the sin was the slanderous report against the Holyland and the spies' rejection of Hashem's treasured land which catalyzed their ruin. Even if the slander had been the result of their terrible attitude to their mission, it hardly warranted such an extreme response.

The Sefas Emes explains this with a perspective on the purpose of the Jew in this world. A person is placed on this world to be a shlich, agent, for Hashem, to fulfill a mission. Man's purpose is to carry out his mission, which is to serve and to fulfill the ratzon, will, of Hashem. A life of purpose is a life of mission. A life without the "mission" experience is not a life. A Jew's approach to life as a Jew is that he is on a mission: no more - no less.

The wilderness is a place which represents an incredible amount of freedom for the Jewish People. They did not have to toil, since everything was provided for them. Food was plentiful. They could sit and learn the entire day without any disturbances. Sheltered from their enemies, ensconced in the Heavenly Clouds, fed from the Heavens, they truly experienced an idyllic lifestyle. Indeed, it would all change with the nation's entrance into Eretz Yisrael, when the supernatural lifestyle to which they had become accustomed would be exchanged for one in which miracles would be covert and reliance on the "laws of nature" would be a requisite. Surrounded by external enemies and having to confront internal social and economic issues, Klal Yisrael had a need for spies to explore the best way to implement their new lifestyle in the land.

In keeping with a Jew's purpose in life, Hashem instructed Moshe to "send forth men." In order to circumvent the eventuality of the spies' falling into any one of the traps that lay before them, they would have to be on a mission. It would have to be a mitzvah, positive command, to reconnoiter Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, had the meraglim stuck to the preconceived plan and acted as Hashem's emissaries, as shlichim, men on a mission, they would have been spared the ambiguities, the challenges that confronted them physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Regrettably, they did not take their responsibility seriously; they did not carry out their mission in the spirit in which they were sent. This is why they slandered the land. They were not taking their mission seriously; thus, they fell prey to the obstacles that undermined their mandate.

This idea applies to life in general. When a Jew views the life experience through the lens of humanity, he is confronted by challenges, obstacles and situations that present themselves as insurmountable hurdles. When one views life through the spectrum of Torah, as a Jew on a mission from Hashem - nothing stands in his way. He sees olam hazeh, this world, for what it really is: impermanent, with no intrinsic value other than serving as a vestibule for gaining entrance into Olam Habba, the World to Come. He understands that he must perform mitzvos, study Torah, carry out acts of lovingkindness, and only then can he cling to Hashem, his Mission Control.

Having had the privilege to write about the lives of a number of Torah luminaries and Torah activists of recent and past generations, I have come across a common thread that courses its way through all of their lives: They all lived with a mission. They had a burning desire: to excel; to achieve; to help all of those in need, physically and spiritually; to stand resolute with fortitude and courage to uphold the banner of Torah; to sanctify Hashem's Name; and to elevate the level of His People in this world. This was their mission, and each one lived for it. In an attempt to develop a corollary that guided them to this awesome responsibility, I searched for what I felt in some way catalyzed them to assume their mission.

These gedolim understood their purpose in life and, hence, responded to it. Reb Yitzchak (Irving) Bunim, zl, America's shtadlan, intercessor, for Jewish needs, builder of Torah, rescuer of Jewish lives, would often relate the moral principle which guided his life. I think this applies equally to so many others, and the model should serve as an inspiration to us all. The famous tzadik, Horav Zushe, zl, m'Anipole used to say that there was only one question which he feared: "If on the Day of Judgment I will be asked, 'Why are you not as great as Moshe Rabbeinu, I will reply that I had neither the mind, the emunah, faith, nor the opportunity. And if I am asked, 'Why did you not become as great as the Gaon m'Vilna?' I will quickly respond that I did not have his incredible acumen. After all, he memorized the Talmud backwards and forwards. One question, however, I fear. When they ask me, 'Why were you not Zushe? Why did you not reach your potential?' That is the question which I cannot answer."

These individuals lived a life in which this question stood before their eyes all of the time. They could not rest, because they understood that they had to live up to their G-d-given potential. This accounted for the way they lived their lives, used their minds and talents, and expended every ounce of energy to complete their missions.

Send forth men, if you please, and let them spy out the land of Canaan. (13:2)

Klal Yisrael's sojourn in the wilderness was checkered with a number of incidents that took their toll on the nation's spiritual well-being. No incident impacted their immediate and ultimate future as much as the incident with the meraglim, spies. Many lessons are to be derived from the nation's behavior and Hashem's response. We will focus on one of these lessons. In one of his shmuesen, ethical discourses, Horav Mordechai Schwab, zl, suggests that one element of their sin is often ignored, an aspect that plagues us to this very day: They should have asked for Daas Torah, the wisdom of the Torah, as expounded by its disseminators. The Torah in Sefer Devarim 1:22 reiterates the episode of the meraglim. "All of you approached me and said, 'Let us send men ahead of us and let them spy out the land.'" The people did not ask if it was the proper and correct thing to do. It was a fait accompli.

A Jew must ask before he undertakes anything. What does the Torah say about my undertaking? It is the right thing to do? Am I acting properly? Perhaps I should take a different approach. Regardless of what a person asks, he must understand that it is improper to make a serious move without first consulting a Torah leader concerning its propriety. This was the error of the meraglim. They did not bother to ask Moshe Rabbeinu if it was the appropriate thing to do. They did not ask, because they did not want to hear his answer. Is that not the reason that most of us seem to ignore this crucial step in our various endeavors?

A person must ask or else he will not know what the correct approach to take is in order to achieve success in his undertaking. The goal is much more than achieving success. When he does not ask, one must be prepared to fail. Rav Schwab cites a powerful statement made by Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl, concerning this subject. We say everyday in our morning tefillah, "May He open our heart though His Torah and imbue our heart with love and awe of Him and that we may do His will and serve Him wholeheartedly, so that we do not struggle in vain nor produce in futility." What is the meaning of v'laasos retzono b'leivav shaleim, "and that we may do His will and serve Him wholeheartedly"? We have just requested to be imbued with Torah, love and fear of Hashem. What else is there to add? Does this not represent the epitome of perfection?

Rav Chatzkel explains that if one does not carry out the will of Hashem, then regardless of his love and fear of the Almighty and his vast erudition in Torah, he will have "struggled in vain and produced for futility." One must do the ratzon Hashem. In order to perform His will, one must know what it is. This can only be achieved by asking our Torah leaders for guidance and following their advice.

We use the phrase Daas Torah loosely to the point that anyone who has spent a few years studying considers himself worthy of this appellation. The individual who introduced the concept of Daas Torah to America--and who set its standard-- was Horav Aharon Kotler, zl. His scope in Torah was all-encompassing. With his brilliant mind and encyclopedic knowledge, he was able to respond to every issue confronting the Jewish people at the time. Daas Torah was a way of life for Rav Aharon, in contradistinction with the prevailing attitude, which considered any Jewish issue not directly linked to Torah study to not be under the purview of Torah leadership. Rav Aharon's intimacy and harmony with the Torah resulted from a ceaseless deveikus, absorption, in Torah, coupled with an appreciation and reverence for Torah. This combination gave him the ability to sense the direction in which the Torah was pointing. His relationship with the Torah transcended vested interests and any external non-Torah related thoughts. In short, he was "one" with the Torah. Thus, he was able to express "its" opinion.

The ability to derive the correct response from the vast storehouse of knowledge represented by the Torah to any given question is what defines a gadol b'Yisrael, Torah leader. Rav Aharon introduced this process to these shores and, as a result, it has become the prevalent way of thinking. I take the liberty of citing an example of Daas Torah. Horav Avraham Pam, zl, had just finished speaking to his students about the value and benefits of dedicating their lives to Torah, explaining that a career in Torah chinuch, education, gives an individual true satisfaction. The father of one of the students heard about this discourse and became very upset. What right did Rav Pam have filling the minds of young men with such ideas. He expressed his disdain to the Rosh Yeshivah. Clearly the yeshivah needs the

support of the Zevullans, he argued, so that the Yissachars can continue learning. This was a reference to the two brothers /tribes of Yisrael who had a partnership in which one brother devoted himself to Torah study, while the other brother engaged in commerce and supported his colleagues in the Yeshivah. The father insisted, "That is what I want for my son. I want him to go to yeshivah for a limited amount of time, then go to work, make money and support Yeshivos!" Rav Pam basically wished the man well and did not continue speaking further on the subject.

The following May, he spoke at a Torah U'Mesorah convention on the following: He explained that we find two types of kedushah, sanctity, in the Beis HaMikdash: kedushas ha'guf, which consecrates the actual animal; and kedushas damim, which consecrates money or possessions to be used to purchase korbanos, sacrifices. While both kedushos are precious, they are not parallel. There are explicit prohibitions concerning being makdish temimim l'bedek ha'Bayis, taking an unblemished animal suitable for a korban, instead using its value for a lesser kedushah, such as buying various fixtures for the maintenance of the Bais HaMikdash. An animal that is destined for a higher level of kedushah should not be squandered for a sanctity of a lesser nature.

Rav Pam then explained that if someone takes his son, who is capable and willing to devote himself fulltime to Torah study and denies him the opportunity, the father is in effect being makdish temimim l'bedek ha'Bayis. While Rav Pam's discourse will certainly raise the ire of some parents, it might cause others to think more cogently and objectively concerning their son's future.

This concept was one to which Rav Aharon would often allude with a mashal, analogy. He would compare the parent who would pull his capable son out of the yeshivah to enter the world of commerce--and thereby be in a position to enable others to learn Torah--to one who needs wood to fashion a handle for the broom used to sweep the shul. He breaks off a piece of the Aron Kodesh, Holy Ark, and uses the wood. The Aron Kodesh is now defaced, but he, at least, has wood for his broom. The floor of the shul can now be swept. How absurd. Regrettably, we never think about our actions with such clarity and objectivity. That requires Daas Torah.

And Moshe sent them from the desert of Paran, by the word of Hashem; they were all men...(13:3)

Rashi teaches us that the Torah's description of the spies as "men" denotes that they were great men, for at that moment they were still upstanding people. It was only later that they seemed to have veered from the moral and righteous path. When they returned corrupt, slandering Eretz Yisrael and impugning Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership, Rashi comments that their "going" and "coming" were alike; just as they returned with evil counsel, so, too, was their initial departure infused with evil intentions. There seems to be some kind of discrepancy between Rashi's comment concerning the description of the spies as "men" and his comment about their original evil intentions. Were they "men," or were they evil? The Gur Arye resolves the contradiction, explaining that before they had been selected to serve as spies, they were righteous, upright people. Once they were chosen to represent the nation, they became influenced by their constituency, whose faith in the Almighty was far from perfect. The people's flawed trust in Hashem spread to the spies like a virus, destroying their own spiritual immune system.

How did this happen? How did individuals who had been considered anashim, righteous, upright men, leaders of their respective communities, become so easily tainted and disgraced? Furthermore, it is not as if Klal Yisrael was totally corrupt. Their emunah, faith in Hashem, was flawed. Quite possibly, they were unaware that their motivation to appoint spies did not emanate from a reasonable and virtuous source, but rather from an unsuspecting, subconscious failing. Yet, this unconscious deficiency was sufficiently influential to transform the anashim into reshaim, wicked people.

Horav A. Henschel, zl, explains that in order to understand the phenomenon which occurred in the spiritual state of the meraglim, one must take into consideration the multifaceted nature of the human psyche. While it is capable of magnificent feats of intellect and emotion, it is still susceptible to the most innocuous outside influences. We are all aware of the influential effect of friends and family. Indeed, the closer one is, the

quicker and more profound is the influence. What we see here is that even a mere relationship--one that is only a professional, work-related association--can have a profound effect on one's character. The mere appointment of the anashim as the official spies on behalf of Klal Yisrael created a connection between them and the nation. This link allowed for the imperceptible pathogen of faithlessness that was beginning to germinate within the people to be transmitted to those righteous men. They became unknowingly infected with the deadly poison through their newly formed alliance.

The Rosh Yeshiva goes on to caution us about those seemingly innocuous relationships which are more na'ive than innocent. They create a powerful impression and ultimately influence how we think and act. The person with whom we daven in shul, meet at the grocery, engage in commerce, or simply have a schmooze, does not leave us when we leave him. The relationship develops and, with it, his influence grows - be it positive or negative. It should be our goal to interact with only those whose thought and deed impact us constructively.

And they went up on the south side and came (in unison) to Chevron, and there were Achiman, Sheishai and Talmi, the offspring of Anak. (13:22)

The pasuk begins, vayaalu, "and they went up," in the plural, and it concludes, va'yavo, "and (he) came," in the singular. In the Talmud Sotah 34b, Chazal interpret va'yavo as a reference to Calev, who went by himself to pray at the gravesite of the Patriarchs, for the fortitude to stand up against the intentions of his colleagues. This idea is confirmed in Sefer Devarim 1:36 when the Torah repeats the story of the meraglim. There it says, "and to him, I will give the land upon which he has trodden." This is a reference to Calev concerning Chevron which ultimately became his. On the other hand, in recording the dialogue between the returning meraglim and Moshe, Rabbeinu the Torah in pasuk 28 writes: Ra'enu sham, "We saw there," indicating that it was not merely Calev who went to Chevron, the home of the giant Anakites. They all went. How are we then to understand the singular form in va'yavo, "and he went"?

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, explains that, indeed, it was the other meraglim who reported the sighting of these unusually large and powerful inhabitants of Canaan. In Sefer Devarim 1:28, we see that these Anakites inspired fear and faint-heartedness into the hearts of the people. The word va'yavo, "and he came," is a reference to the entire group, connoting the singular purpose of their mission, but something happened to this mission. They came together to Chevron as one, but departed as a splintered group. Calev was no longer with them. What happened?

It was the Anakites, descendants of a race of giants, and the type of environment in which they lived--their homes, the entire city which they had built to coincide with their unusual dimensions--which created a change of heart. It instilled them with fear, which catalyzed the beginning of a wavering in their belief, an alteration in their commitment. They were no longer confident of success, because their trust in Hashem had been shaken by the sight of these strange looking people. Until Chevron, the predominant influence of Calev prevailed. They were all united in courage, determination and faith. Once they arrived in Chevron, Calev felt the beginning of a difference in his faith and theirs. He sensed a rift and, therefore, he went to the gravesite of the Patriarchs alone. He needed to pray for continued courage and stalwartness.

Chevron was the determining factor in their commitment. They all had originally left with peripheral faith. When it was tested, however, they did not pass the test. Their faith was not intrinsic. It was all external; it was all superficial. The meraglim defected. Calev continued on. Thus, he was rewarded with the city of Chevron.

Regrettably, this is not an unusual phenomenon in Jewish life. People talk as believers, reiterate their devotion, declare their commitment - until the going gets rough. At the first sight of something out of the ordinary, they slowly begin to defect, to melt away, to abandon their commitment.

Emunah, faith, in the Almighty must be able to withstand the test of time and pressure. Believing in Hashem only when the sun shines in our face does not take much resolution. It is when we are confronted with financial difficulty, physical and emotional affliction, the stress of family issues, that we indicate our true belief.

And they shall make for themselves tzitzis on the corners of their garments, throughout their generations. (15:38)

Translated simply, we are hereby instructed to attach Tzitzis to the ends of all four-cornered garments. This mitzvah is to continue l'doroseichem, "throughout the generations." The Zohar HaKadosh in the Zohar Chadash Rus 84:2, interprets l'doroseichem as being related to the word dirah, dwelling. He explains that the first two parshios of Krias Shema are enclosed in the Mezuzah which is placed on the doorpost of our homes. The third parsha, which is the parsha of Tzitzis, is not included therein. How are the Mezuzah and its protective force completed? When a person dons a Tallis Kattan, he is wrapped in the third parsha, thereby completing the shielding properties associated with the Krias Shema. It is like saying that the Jew who is not wearing Tzitzis is missing shleimus in the safeguarding effect provided by Krias Shema. We are always in search of reasons to explain why something went wrong or why our best-laid plans did not generate the success we had planned. The Torah provides opportunities for insurance, such as the Mezuzah. Similar to an insurance policy, one must pay his fee in order to receive coverage. Without the Tzitzis on his back, the Mezuzah's coverage of the Jew cannot be activated in full force.

Va'ani Tefillah

Nosein lechem la'reivim, Hashem matir assurim

Hashem pokeach ivrim, Hashem zokeif kefufim

He gives bread to the hungry; Hashem releases the bound, Hashem gives sight to the blind, Hashem straightens the bent.

David HaMelech details the wonderful and kind deeds Hashem will perform for those who have heretofore suffered in silence. It is a moving tribute which clearly makes one feel good that ultimately, one day, those who have experienced any form of adversity will be heard and their challenges remedied. Is that not expected? It appears that David HaMelech is teaching us a novel idea. What is so unusual about Hashem righting the wronged and changing life for those who have been hungry, unable to see, depressed and dejected. What new ground is being broken with this affirmation of Hashem's concern and His healing powers? Hashem is Keil Rachum v'Chanun, merciful and compassionate. This is what He does. The answer is that we know it - but does the world acknowledge Hashem as the Source of all good, or do they attribute it to the philanthropist, the physician, the social worker, etc.? One day, we will all realize that it has been Hashem Who has orchestrated all events, Who heals, Who inspires, Who guides. We will finally open our eyes and see clearly that which is beyond us.

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

Rabbi Yissocher Frand on Parshas Sh'lach

The Pull of Society and Social Pressure

Parshas Sh'lach contains a "low water mark" in the history of the Jewish people – the incident of the Meraglim [Spies], the nation's balking at entering the Promised Land, and the Divine punishment that followed these events. The event was an unmitigated disaster. Because of the needless crying on the night the spies returned (the eve of the Ninth of Av), that date was set aside for crying throughout the generations.

The Torah says that there were two spies that did not follow in the path of the others – Kalev and Yehoshua. Chazal make a point of telling us that these two spies had special help in being able to stand up to the rest of the spies. Yehoshua was given a special name change by Moshe (from Hoshea to Ye-hoshua) indicating a prayer (may G-d (Yud-Hey) save you (Hoshea) from the counsel of the spies. Moshe anticipated through Divine Inspiration that Yehoshua would need extra protection to stand up to the evil report of his fellow spies. Similarly, Chazal say that Kalev went to the grave of the Patriarchs in Chevron and prayed for Divine Assistance. This prayer is what gave him the fortitude to withstand the "counsel of the spies".

This is testimony to that which the Rambam says [Hilchos Deos 6:1] (and that which is a sociological fact), namely "a person's nature is to be drawn in his opinions and his actions after his friends and companions." Man is the only creature who speaks. Man is a social animal who must interact, and in order to interact it is necessary for him to communicate. In order to communicate, man was given a form of intelligent speech. The downside of this trait is that man is greatly influenced by the speech and communication he receives from others. "Therefore," the Rambam continues, "man must dwell amongst righteous and wise individuals so that he may learn from their actions and distance himself from the wicked who walk in the ways of darkness so that he not learn from their ways..." In short, the Rambam teaches that a person must be exceedingly careful regarding the company he keeps. Ultimately, a person will become who his neighbors and friends are. If the friends and neighbors are looking out for spiritual growth, then he too will grow spiritually. If the reverse is true, then the outcome will be reversed as well.

Therefore, Kalev and Yehoshua needed special Divine Assistance (s'yata d'shmaya) to stand up to the other spies. Without s'yata d'shmaya, they would have been swept away by what the other spies reported.

Sociological studies have been done where 20 people are in a room and 19 of the participants are "in" on the study and they are told to answer a question in a patently false way (e.g. – the orange is blue). Invariably, the 20th person, who is the actual subject of the study, when asked to answer the same question, answers it in a way that is absurd, just to make his answer correspond with that of everyone else in the room. So profound is the influence of society that something can be black and white and a person will change his response just to conform to everyone else!

All anyone needs to do is step out into the street in order to witness the profound influence of society. We have a cleaning lady who comes once a week to clean the house. My wife recently noticed that she now has a tattoo on her ankle. When I was growing up, sailors had tattoos. No one else had tattoos. It was unheard of for a woman to have a tattoo. Getting tattooed is a painful procedure.

My wife asked the cleaning lady why she decided to get a tattoo. She responded, "Because all my friends have tattoos." My wife has been teaching in Bais Yaakov for over 20 years now. In previous years, when my wife taught the story of Eliezer and Rivka and she mentioned that Eliezer brought nose-rings, the girls in the class did not understand what nose-rings were. "Who wears nose-rings these days?" Today, if you go out into the street you see them. It is hard to even look at it, it's so ugly. If a law was passed that said "Everyone must have their noses pierced" or "their lips pierced" the civil liberties groups would protest that this is cruel and unusual punishment. But if society suddenly decides that they want their noses pierced, their lips pierced, and worse, then everyone starts doing it! The fact that it looks disgusting and is painful and is crazy is irrelevant. "The nature of man is to be drawn in his thoughts and actions after his companions." Such is the unbelievably profound pull of society on human beings.

This is precisely why the Rambam counsels us to dwell amongst the righteous and to seek counsel amongst the wise. We must be particularly careful who our friends are and we must be even more particularly careful about who our children's friends are. Adults are somewhat less susceptible to the pressures of society, but for children -- especially teenagers and adolescents – the influence of their environment is all that counts. It is particularly important to ensure -- to whatever extent possible -- that our children's friends are righteous and wise.

Sarai's Yud Rightfully Went to Yehoshua

Chazal say that the letter Yud added onto the name of Hoshea came from the name Sarai (Sin Reish Yud) that was changed to Sarah (Sin Reish Hay). This Yud was floating in a state of suspended animation from the time of the Matriarch Sarah to the time of Yehoshua. Was there not an opportunity in those hundreds of intervening years to do something with this poor little letter?

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in his Ozneyim L'Torah, offers a beautiful insight. Rav Sorotzkin points out a strong connection between Sarah and Yehoshua. Sarai was barren and unable to have children. It was only after

the name change that her "mazel" changed and she became "a new person" who was able to have a son. Who was that son? Yitzchak.

When Yitzchak and Yishmael were growing up and they both stood in line to inherit Avraham Avinu, it was Sarah who insisted "This son of the handmaid will not inherit with my son, Yitzchak." [Bereshis 21:10] It was Sarah who ultimately saw to it that the descendants of Yitzchak rather than the descendants of Yishmael should get the Land of Israel.

Yehoshua was the one who brought us into the Land of Israel. It was he who actualized the inheritance that the Matriarch Sarah enabled. It is therefore fitting that the Yud that came from Sarah's previous name (Sarai) now be passed on to Yehoshua, who would bring to fruition the inheritance made possible by the new identity of the Matriarch Sarah, mother of Yitzchak.

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Rabbi Benjamin Yudin The TorahWeb Foundation Climbing to the Divine

Immediately, upon hearing the dreadful report of the spies, Calev silenced the people, and proclaimed assuredly "oloh na-aleh"- we shall surely ascend and conquer the land (Bamidbar 13:30). Rashi adds that the double language "shall surely ascend" connotes even if it means to the heavens. Were Moshe to ask us to make ladders and go up there (to the heavens) we would succeed in following him.

The Admor of Ostrovitz z"l sees an additional deeper meaning than following Moshe blindly even to the heavens. It is not only that Moshe earned our trust by his past performances and accomplishments of splitting the sea, and bringing down the manna, but Moshe as Rabbeinu- our teacher par excellence- is showing how we could ascend to the heavens, by building ladders and going up step by step. The Torah is teaching us often there are no short cuts to success. One has to progress slowly, gradually and with focus.

The mishnah (Keilim 1:6-9) teaches that there are ten levels of kedusha-sanctity- associated with the Land of Israel. While the literal understanding of the mishnah refers to geographic locations within Eretz Yisroel and the Bais HaMikdash, this certainly may be applied to different aspects of Eretz Yisroel. The Talmud (Kesubos 111A) teaches that if one walks 4 cubits (6 feet) in Eretz Yisroel he has earned (thereby) a share in the World to Come. One could only imagine the significance and higher rung for one who lives in the land, earns his livelihood in the land, contributes to the welfare of the land and fulfills the mitzvah of yishuv ha'aretz.

The land contains plentiful rungs. The Tur (ch. 208) cites that his father the Rosh omitted in the "Al HaMichya" blessing the phrase "v'nochal mipirya"- that we may eat of the fruit of the Land of Israel. The Talmud (Sotah 14A) states that Moshe did not wish to enter the land to eat of its fruit, but rather he craved to perform the mitzvos that can only be fulfilled in the land. The Rosh therefore omitted "v'nochal mipirya". The Bach says we are to recite it, as indeed, the fruit of the Land of Israel contains kedusha- sanctity.

There are many rungs to the redemptive process. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 98A) teaches in the name of Rabi Abba that there is no greater indication of the end of the Exile and beginning of Redemption than the Land of Israel producing and yielding fruit in abundance in preparation of the return of the Jewish People to its land. This is the first rung and we b'ezras Hashem have seen with our own eyes this incredible phenomenon, both in the positive harvesting throughout the land and the refusal of the land to yield produce to its enemies.

Thus, the minyan of spies that demoralized the nation are defied by Calev and the metaphor of the ladder. Yes, there are challenges and crises to be met and encountered, but step by step, rung by rung, we can prevail. Why? Because "asher barah Elokim la'asos" (Braishis 2:3) - He abstained on Shabbos from all His work which G-d created to do. The last two words are an invitation to man to initiate- to do, and then He will assist and complete the efforts of man. We have to build the ladder and begin

ascending. But then He takes us to the top. To cite Rashi (Bamidbar 3:16): Hashem said to Moshe "you do yours and I will do Mine." If need be we can ascend to the heavens if not beyond!

It is interesting to note that this directive to ascend to the heavens is found a second time in the Torah at the end of Moshe's oration in the book of Devarim. Moshe declares (30:12) "it (the Torah) is not in heaven." Rashi directs you to the Talmud (Eruvin 55A) that teaches that "if it were in the heavens, you would be required to go up in pursuit of it." Once again the image of ladders and rungs comes to mind.

The Medrash (Devarim Rabbah 8:3) commenting on the verse in Proverbs (24:7) "wisdom is too lofty for a fool, he does not open his mouth at the gate," explains that a fool enters the study hall and inquires how one can participate in the discussion. He is told: first one studies the Hebrew language, then Chumash, then the Prophets, then Scriptures, then the Mishnah, then the Talmud, then the codified laws, then the philosophy of Torah. Upon hearing this seemingly colossal assignment of prerequisites, the fool declares: "when can I ever succeed in mastering the above?" And he leaves the study hall frustrated and dejected. Hence the latter half of the above cited verse "he does not open his mouth at the gate". The wise individual studies one letter a day, one verse a day, one mishnah, one blat, one siman until he is most capable of partaking in the discussion in the study hall. The image of the ladder conveys not only the resolve of the Jew to study Torah, because of which he would even pursue it to the heavens. But in addition, the method by which he acquires Torah is rung by rung.

Here too, as with Eretz Yisroel, Hashem says you do yours and I will do Mine. Rav Moshe Shapira shlita conveyed the message of Sefiras HaOmer (counting the Omer) in the following way: The Torah ordains (Vayikra 23:16) "tisperu chamishim yom- you shall count fifty days". In reality, we only count seven weeks, or forty nine days. However, there are fifty rungs of purity and a similar number of impurity. Part of the haste in leaving Egypt, explain the commentaries, is that Israel had fallen to the forty ninth rung of impurity, and thus needed to be expelled from there. Similarly, there are fifty levels of knowledge and a corresponding number of ignorance. The maximum that man can attain on his own is the forty ninth rung of knowledge insight and understanding. Hashem says you count forty nine days, prepare yourselves for the humanly impossible and I will share with you a taste of Torah, a part of the fiftieth. We do ours, we are to climb the spiritual ladder of Torah, and He takes us over the top.

Finally, there is a third area that I believe the imagery of the ladder and ascending rungs is applicable. The Talmud (Brachos 5A) teaches in the name of R' Shimon Bar Yochai "the Holy One Blessed Be He gave three good gifts to Israel, and He gave them only through suffering". They are Torah, the Land of Israel, and the World to Come. Olam HaBa - the World to Come - is reached rung by rung.

The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 18A) tells of the tragic death of Rabi Chanina ben Tradyon. The Romans (yimach shemam) brought the rabbi wrapped in a Sefer Torah, encircled them with bundles of vine shoots and set them on fire. As the fire continued to rage, the (Roman) executioner asked R' Chanina, "if I increase the flame and remove the tufts of wool from your heart (that his killers had placed to prolong his agony and death), will you bring me with you to the life of the World to Come?" R' Chanina answered yes. The executioner insisted that the rabbi swear, and he did. He immediately increased the flame and removed the tufts of wool from Rabi Chanina's heart and the latter's soul departed more quickly. Then the executioner jumped and fell into the fire, whereupon a heavenly voice issued forth and proclaimed "Rabi Chanina and the executioner have been readied for the World to Come". When Rebbi heard of the above he cried and declared "there are those who acquire their place in the World to Come in a single moment, and those who acquire their share in Olam HaBa through years of spiritual striving and accomplishments."

Aside from the literal understanding of Rebbi's teaching, one may understand it to mean Rebbi cried for if one can acquire a share in Olam HaBa in a single moment with a single act, how much more could that person have attained with many noble acts? Olam HaBa is acquired rung by rung.

The levels of the World to Come are featured in the blessing a Jew recites after an aliyah to the Torah. He thanks Hashem for giving us a Torah of

truth and “v’chayay olam nata b’socheinu”- and for implanting eternal life within us. The word “chayay” in the plural denotes rungs or measures of accomplishments and commensurate rewards.

Finally, the Talmud (Megillah 28B) teaches he who studies Torah laws every day has the assurance that he will be in the World to Come. The daily prescription of study reflecting the rung by rung approach is the assured method of acquisition.

Eretz Yisroel, Torah and Olam HaBa share the common trait of being this worldly, but because they possess a special infusion of the Divine, by nature they appear to be most difficult and challenging for mortal man. Calev in Parshas Shelach teaches the formula for success in all three— proceed rung by rung and Hashem completes the ascent.

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Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski

The TorahWeb Foundation

“Who is honored? He who honors others” (Pirke Avos 4:1)

We recite Pirke Avos every Shabbos during the summer. Do we hear what we read?

Self-esteem is the cornerstone of good health, both emotional and physical. Unwarranted feelings of inferiority and inadequacy can be crushing, resulting in depression and in a variety of self-defeating behaviors. The self-concept affects one’s ability to learn and to grow, to relate to others— family, friends, work and even to G-d.

But how does a person form a self-concept? Very often by how he sees himself valued by others. The Torah makes this very clear. The spies sent by Moses to scout Canaan reported that the land was inhabited by giants. “We were like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and so we were in their eyes” (Numbers 13:33). Whereupon Rebbe Yitzhak Meir of Gur commented, “The way you feel about yourself is the way you assume other people see you.”

In other words, you are not what you think you are, and you are not what other people think you are. Rather, you are what you think other people think you are, and you may be in error about that. Most people depend on other people for their self-concept. They are approval seekers, believing that love, acceptance, security and salvation are all dependent on doing what others approve of.

But what do others approve of? What do they value? In today’s Torah world people are generally esteemed either because they are very learned, very wealthy, or have achieved some type of prominence. But where does that leave the “average Joe?” Although he may have some Torah knowledge, he is not an outstanding scholar, and although he can pay his bills, he is not particularly wealthy. He feels lost in the shuffle, and passes this feeling on to his children.

But Judaism was not intended to be an elitist society. “You are children to Hashem” (Deuteronomy 14:1) was said to Klal Yisrael, all of Israel. Every person is dear to Hashem.

I believe that this was the scene upon which the Baal Shem Tov came. The oppressive conditions under which the Jews in Russia and Poland lived did not allow many people to become very learned. I am told that the number of students in Lakewood today exceeds the number of students in all the pre-World War I yeshivos in Europe! Many Jews did not get a post-cheder education. They knew some Chumash and a smattering of Mishnayes and Ein Yaakov. Most lived very frugal lives in the small shtetl. The wealthiest citizen in the village became the town parnass (community administrator) or appointed the parnass and controlled him. Although the Rav and the parnass were often at odds, they were, nevertheless, the only significant people in the community. The average person in the community could not feel very significant.

In addition to the Baal Shem Tov’s teaching of Chasidic principles, he championed the common man. “Do you realize,” he said, “that when a man comes home from work and says, ‘Oy! It is only a few minutes before sunset!’ and hurriedly davens Mincha, do you realize that angels tremble before the holiness of his prayer?”

One Shabbos at Seuda Shlishis, the Baal Shem Tov was expounding profound meanings of the Torah to his disciples, while in the anteroom, the

simple folk were reciting Tehillim (Psalms). Rebbe Dov of Mezeritch, who was the Baal Shem Tov’s successor, thought “How fortunate we are, that we can learn Torah from the master, not like those simple folk, who can only recite Tehillim.” Abruptly, the Baal Shem Tov told his disciple to put their hands on their neighbor’s shoulder, and he put his hands on the shoulders of the disciples to his right and left, completing the circle. Suddenly, they felt themselves transported to heaven, where they heard sweet voices reciting verses of Tehillim. One said, “Heavenly Father, my soul thirsts for You, my flesh longs for You.” Another said, “Oh, that I had wings like the dove! I would fly off and find rest.” Rebbe Dov was moved to tears, thinking, “If only I could recite Tehillim with such depth of feeling!” The Baal Shem Tov then lifted his hands, and the trance was broken.

The Baal Shem Tov said to his disciples, “The sweet rendering of Tehillim that you heard was that being recited by the simple folk in the anteroom.” The learned disciples were envious of the heartfelt devotion of which the simple folk were capable.

This is further illustrated by an anecdote of Rebbe Shalom Ber of Lubavitch, who was asked by one of his chasidim why he shows so great favor to the simple folk. This chasid was a diamond merchant. The Rebbe asked, “Can you show me some of your wares?”, whereupon the chasid showed him a packet of diamonds. The Rebbe pointed to a large stone, saying, “That is indeed a beautiful diamond.” The chasid said, “No, Rebbe, that diamond has many flaws.” He pointed to a much smaller stone. “Now, here is a perfect stone,” he said. The Rebbe said, “But the larger stone is much prettier.” The chasid said, “Rebbe, one must be a mayvin on diamonds.” The Rebbe said, “You are a mayvin on diamonds, and I am a mayvin on Jewish neshamos (souls).

Yes, everyone wishes to be approved by others, but one’s self-esteem should not be dependent on them.

We arise in the morning and say, “Hashem, the neshamah you instilled within me is pure.” The neshamah was “breathed” into man at creation, and as the Zohar points out, “When one exhales, it comes from within oneself,” and inasmuch as the Torah says that Hashem breathed the neshamah into man, it is part of Hashem Himself. Every person thus has something of Hashem within oneself, and that is what gives one inestimable value.

Halacha reinforces this point. If someone is ordered to kill another person or be killed, halacha requires that he accept martyrdom. “What makes you think that your blood is redder than someone else’s blood?” (Pesachim 25b). In other words, the other person’s life is as valuable as yours. But consider this scenario. The person who is ordered to kill is an outstanding scholar or a great philanthropist, the pillar of the community, and the person he is ordered to kill is a tramp, a scoundrel who is a burden to the community. Halacha requires that he allow himself to be killed because “What makes you think that your blood is redder than someone else’s blood?” Is it not clear who is of greater value? Perhaps by our own judgment, but not in Hashem’s eyes.

Every person has intrinsic value, regardless of what others think of him. Of course, this intrinsic value, the presence of Hashem within a person, places a great responsibility to actualize this enormous potential and to make oneself an appropriate receptacle for the neshamah.

The Baal Shem Tov was told of a chazzan who chanted the al chet (confession of sins) with a very lively rather than a solemn melody. The chazzan explained, “If I were given the task of cleaning out the rubbish from the palace to make it more comfortable for the king, wouldn’t I be happy to do so? When I say the al chet, I am ridding myself of my sins, making myself a more pleasant place for the neshamah.

Why, then, do we seek that others attest to our worthiness? It is because the yetzer hara tries to crush us to make us feel unworthy. The Talmud says that the yetzer hara grows stronger each day and tries to crush a person. If it can throw a person into the depressed feeling of inferiority and unworthiness, it can paralyze him so that one cannot be productive. We must resist this onslaught of the yetzer hara and feel worthy. Of course, we cannot be derelict in our obligation to become that which we can be.

Mesilas Yesharim begins by discussing the obligation of a person in this world. The greatest scholar and the most unlearned person, the most

generous philanthropist and the most humble mendicant each have a similar obligation of self-fulfillment.

How we fulfill ourselves varies with our circumstances. The great sage, Rabbi Eliezer fell seriously ill, and his students came to comfort him. One student said, "Our master! You are dearer to us than a father and mother. A father and mother can provide a child only with this world, but you, our master, have provided us with the World to Come." Rabbi Eliezer did not acknowledge this student's comment.

Another student said, "Our master! You are dearer to us than the sun. The sun can provide a person only with this world, but you, our master, have provided us with the World to Come." Rabbi Eliezer remained silent.

A third student said, "Our master! You are dearer to us than the rain. The rain can provide a person only with this world, but you, our master, have provided us with the World to Come." Again, Rabbi Eliezer remained silent.

Then Rabbi Akiva spoke up. "Suffering can be precious," he said. Rabbi Eliezer said, "Help me sit up so that I can better hear what my child, Akiva, has to say." (Sanhedrin 101a)

The other students had said things which should have comforted Rabbi Eliezer. Why did he ignore them and listen only to Rabbi Akiva?

Resting on one's laurels is vanity and achieves nothing. Rabbi Eliezer valued life because it provided him with the opportunity to do G-d's will. But he was now weak and bed ridden and could do nothing. This depressed him, and the fact that he had achieved much in the past did not comfort him in the least. He could be comforted only if there was something he could do now.

What Rabbi Akiva said was that the Divine will is that a person should maximize oneself spiritually. This is what man was created for, and maximizing oneself is self-fulfillment, which is the only thing that Rabbi Eliezer felt was of value. However, in his condition, he did not see what he could do that would be spiritually fulfilling.

Rabbi Akiva said that self-fulfillment consists of doing whatever one can do at any particular moment, given one's condition at that moment. What he told the master was essentially, "When you had the ability to teach, your self-fulfillment was teaching. Your condition now does not permit you to do that or anything else that you consider important. All you can do now is accept your suffering with trust and faith in G-d, and when you do that, you are fulfilling yourself every bit as much as when you taught us."

There is much one can do at any one moment. Rebbe Yeruchem Levovitz points out that the purpose of creation is to recognize ein od milvado, that there is nothing in the world other than G-dliness. This is why Rambam elaborates in the fifth of Eight Chapters that every action one does should be directed at awareness of Hashem and serving Him. It is not only with the manifest mitzvos that one serves Hashem, but also when one eats and sleeps in order to have the energy to do mitzvos, and when one works and engages in commerce in order to give tzedakah and provide a Torah education for one's children. Bchal derachecha da'ehu, know Hashem in all your ways (Proverbs 3:6), in everything you do. A person with limited scholarship can achieve this just as the most learned person.

I sometimes hear criticism about the biographies of our tzaddikim, making them out to be angels, whose level of kedusha is beyond our reach. In a letter to a student, Hagaon Harav Yitschak Hutner points out that the Chafetz Chaim was not born a completed tzaddik, but had many struggles and many descents from which he had to elevate himself. Many of our gedolim had to struggle to subdue the undesirable character traits inherent in the human being. They were not angels. To the contrary, they were great human beings, which made them greater than angels.

In a particular shidduch, the young man's mother said, "Perhaps they would not want to marry into our family, because we have a shoemaker in our mishpacha. We trace our family back to Rebbe Yohanan Hasandlar."

When I planned to go to medical school, I consulted the Steipler gaon. In a letter published in Karaina D'igresse, the Steipler wrote that rather than being a Rav in America, it is better to make a living of melacha kalla unekia, a decent job, and that when Rashba forbade studying secular subjects before age twenty five, he exempted the study of medicine. I went to medical school with the Steipler's blessing, and continued an ongoing relationship with him for years.

People who are professionals or engage in business, who are kovea ittim l'Torah, with daily Torah study, tzedaka and fulfillment of mitzvos, deserve to be respected and honored.

The value society puts on people is spurious, and we are not likely to change society. We should be aware of our intrinsic value and greatness. We should begin each day with the thought of what we can do today to fulfill ourselves, and we should be proud of who we are.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Shlach: Rejecting the Land of Israel

"And [the spies] began to speak badly about the land that they had explored." [Num. 13:32]

Shortly after the end of World War II, at a Shabbat table in Jerusalem, the discussion turned to the deplorable phenomenon of visitors who tour the land of Israel and then return home disparaging the country. "These tourists complain about the heat, the poverty, the backwardness, the political situation - and discourage other Jews from moving here," lamented one of those present.

The room became quiet. Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook, son of Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook, the first chief rabbi, responded by relating the following parable.

The Failed Match

There was once a wealthy man who desired to marry a certain young lady. She was the most beautiful girl in town, and was blessed with many talents and a truly refined character. Since her family was not well-off, they were eager about the possible match with the wealthy man.

The young woman, however, was not interested in the match. Rich or not, the young man was coarse and ill-mannered. She refused to meet with him. The father, anxious that his daughter should get married, pressured her to meet with the young man. 'After all, one meeting doesn't obligate you to marry him!' To please her father, the young woman agreed.

The following Shabbat, the fellow arrived at the house as arranged. Shortly afterwards, the girl made her entrance: her hair uncombed, wearing a crumpled, worn dress and shabby house slippers. Appalled at her disheveled appearance, it didn't take long before the young man excused himself and made a hurried exit.

"What everyone says about this girl - it's not true," exclaimed the astonished young man to his friends. "She's a hideous old hag!"

Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah then explained his parable. Superficially, it would appear that the young fellow had rejected the young woman. But in truth, she had rejected him. So too, the land of Israel does not display her beauty to all who visit. Not everyone is worthy enough to merit seeing the special qualities and holiness of Eretz Yisrael. It appears as if the dissatisfied visitors are the ones who reject the land of Israel, but in fact, it is the land that rejects them.

Seeing the Goodness of Jerusalem

Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah's response was most appropriate for the son of Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook. When guests from outside of Israel would ask the chief rabbi for a blessing, he would quote the verse from Psalms 128:5, "May God bless you from Zion." What is this 'blessing from Zion'? As the verse continues, "And may you see the goodness of Jerusalem."

Rav Kook would explain: the verse does not say that one should merit seeing Jerusalem, but "the goodness of Jerusalem." Many people visit the holy city, but not all merit seeing its inner goodness..

[adapted from "Malachim Kivnei Adam" by Rabbi Simcha Raz, pp. 227-278, 230]
Comments and inquiries may be sent to: RavKookList@gmail.com

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt
Avoiding Yichud in Everyday Situations
Rulings of Rav Moshe Feinstein

The last two weeks we reviewed some of the basic halachos of yichud, the prohibition against a man being alone in a secluded place with a woman. As we have seen, the laws of yichud are complex and the opinions of the poskim wide-ranging. In this part of the series, therefore, will focus exclusively on the rulings of Rav Moshe Feinstein, one of the greatest halachic authorities of our generation. Dissenting opinions appear only in the footnotes. A final ruling will depend on the specific circumstances of each situation and the individual rav's decision according to the facts presented to him.

Question: With whom is yichud forbidden?

Discussion: Unless they are married, a man may not be alone with any woman, and a woman may not be alone with any man, with the following exceptions:

1. His mother and grandmother; her father and grandfather.
2. His daughter and granddaughter; her son and grandson.
3. His sister; her brother. Brother and sister may not live together in the same house for a period of time which exceeds the normal stay of a house guest. They should also not be left together without a chaperon when their parents are away for an extended period of time.¹
4. His father's sister and his mother's sister.² They may not live together in the same house for a period of time which exceeds the normal stay of a house guest.
5. His adopted daughter; her adopted son. This is permitted only as long as both adoptive parents are alive and married to each other.³ (Example: An adoptive father may not be secluded with his adopted daughter after his wife passes away, or if he divorces his wife.)
Yichud with a daughter-in-law or a mother-in law is strictly forbidden.⁴
A man is permitted⁵ to be secluded with a woman if he is in the company of his grandmother, mother, daughter, granddaughter, or sister [of any age over seven].⁶ During nighttime sleeping hours, an additional chaperon is required.
Two sisters cannot serve as chaperons for each other. Thus yichud with two sisters is forbidden.⁷
A man and a woman may remain alone in a home where the parents of one of them are sleeping.⁸

Question: At what age does the prohibition of yichud begin and end?

Discussion: A male over thirteen is prohibited from being alone with a female over the age of three. Under extenuating circumstances, it is permitted to be alone with a female who is under the age of seven.⁹
A female over twelve may not be alone with a male over nine.
In certain circumstances it is permitted for a woman to be alone with an old man who is bedridden.¹⁰ A rav must be consulted.

Question: Is one allowed to be secluded with a woman if her husband is in town?

Discussion: "In town" means that he is able to come home at any time he chooses.¹¹ Even if he works on the other side of town, as long as he makes his own hours [like a salesman, for example], it is considered as if he is "in town." If, however, he works fixed hours and cannot leave his workplace whenever he wants, it is considered as if he is "out of town."¹²
When the husband is "in town," the fear of his appearing suddenly is a deterrent to his wife's engaging in illicit behavior. But the wife fears her husband's sudden appearance only in a place where he is likely to find her (e.g., her home; her office). If, however, she secludes herself in a place where her husband will not easily find her, yichud is forbidden even if her husband is "in town."¹³
Her husband's presence "in town" does not override the prohibition of yichud if a close, long-standing friendship exists between the man and the woman.¹⁴
Although a husband's presence "in town" alleviates the prohibition of yichud for his wife, the reverse is not true. The presence of a wife "in

town" [but not in the house or in the immediate vicinity] does not mitigate her husband's yichud prohibition.¹⁵

Question: Is yichud permitted if the door to the house is open?

Discussion: The door does not need to be actually open to permit yichud. Even if the door is closed but not locked, or even if it is locked but there is a reasonable possibility that people may knock on the door [or ring the bell] and expect to be answered, yichud is permitted.¹⁶
Even if the door is locked, if the window shades or drapes are open and there is a clear view into the room, yichud is permitted.¹⁷
When driving on an isolated highway, one should not be alone with a woman in a car. Under extenuating circumstances, one may be lenient, even at night and even with a non-Jewish driver.¹⁸
It is proper to be stringent and not rely on the "open door" leniency if a close, long-standing friendship exists between the man and the woman.¹⁹
During regular office hours, a woman may be alone with her doctor. After regular office hours, her husband or a child must accompany her.²⁰
Yichud is prohibited even for a very short time, as long as the possibility exists that it may last for a longer time.²¹ Being together in an elevator, though, is not forbidden because of yichud.²²
Yichud is prohibited even if the man and the woman are in two separate rooms in the same house and each one can lock his/her door from the inside.²³

Question: What are the halachos of yichud if more than one man or woman are involved?

Discussion: Yichud is permitted with two or more men during the day-time and evening hours, and with three or more men during nighttime sleeping hours.²⁴
The Rishonim disagree whether yichud is permitted when more than two women are present. Rashi, quoted by Rama, holds that when three²⁵ women are present, yichud is permitted.²⁶ Rambam, quoted by the Shulchan Aruch, holds that the presence of a greater number of women does not alleviate the prohibition of yichud. The basic halachah follows the view of the Rambam.²⁷ Consequently, a man may not be alone even with a hundred women.²⁸

During daytime and evening hours, yichud is permitted if a child is also present. During nighttime sleeping hours, two children are required. There are conflicting opinions²⁹ as to the minimum and maximum ages for the child as regards this halachah. Rav Feinstein is quoted³⁰ as ruling that either a boy or a girl chaperon must be at least seven years old. Once they become bar/bas mitzvah, they are no longer considered children.³¹
Note: These rules apply to yichud with a G-d fearing, observant Jew. If the people with whom one would be secluded are perutzim, i.e., lax in their observance of mitzvos, some of the halachos may change. A rav should be consulted

Footnotes

- 1 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:64-3. While all poskim agree that one may not "live" with his sister, there are different opinions as to what "live" means. Some (Imrei Yosher 2:43) hold that less than thirty days is permitted, while others (Shevet ha-Levi 5:201-2) hold that no more than three days is permitted. According to Rav Feinstein's ruling quoted above, it all depends on the length of a typical house guest's stay. Thus a sister who is visiting from a distant city may stay longer than a sister visiting from a nearby area, just as a guest from afar stays longer than a guest from nearby.
- 2 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:64-1. Other poskim do not mention this leniency.
- 3 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:64-2. Almost all other poskim disagree and hold that yichud is not permitted with adopted children.
- 4 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:63; 64-1. This is the basic halachah. A minority view (R'ashash, Kiddushin 81b; Salmas Yosef 34) allows yichud with these relatives. Generally, one should not rely on this leniency.
- 5 Some poskim do not agree with this leniency, but many others do.
- 6 Igros Moshe, E.H. 2:15; 4:65-8. Possibly, his father's or mother's sister are also considered chaperons. [Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:64-3 seems, without explanation, to permit yichud with a woman and her daughter or granddaughter. If this is truly Rav Feinstein's view (it may very well be that this is a printing error), it is contrary to the view of all other poskim and is against the basic principles of hilchos yichud. This ruling should not be relied upon without further investigation.]
- 7 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:64-3.

8 Oral ruling by Rav Feinstein quoted in Ohalei Yeshurun, pg. 7.
9 Oral ruling by Rav M. Feinstein (quoted in Children in Halachah, pg. 40) based on the rationale presented in Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-12, where, in the final analysis, Rav Feinstein is hesitant to permit this. He writes, however, that he would not object to those who are lenient.
10 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-10. See also Tzitz Eliezer 6:40-22.
11 A husband in jail, for example, is not considered “in town;” Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-7.
12 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-7. Other poskim rule that as long as he is literally in the same town, even if he is presently unable to come, he is still considered to be “in town.”
13 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-21. In addition, some poskim hold that a husband “in town” only serves as a deterrent when the wife is meeting the man without the husband’s knowledge. If, however, they are meeting with his permission — either in her home or in his — then the wife will not be as deterred by her husband’s being in town (see Binas Adam 126:27 for an elaborate explanation). Other poskim (Chida, Chazon Ish) do not agree with this stringency. Igros Moshe rules that while it is appropriate to be stringent, under extenuating circumstances one may be lenient.
14 E.H. 22:8. See Igros Moshe, Y.D. 2:35.
15 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-6. Other poskim are more lenient.
16 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-4. Rav Feinstein’s ruling here is extremely lenient and it goes against the view of all other poskim. While many poskim are of the opinion that an unlocked door is considered an “open door,” or even that a locked door is considered an “open door” when someone with a key may come in at any time, no other poskim allow yichud behind locked doors just because someone who may knock on the door and expects to be acknowledged, may come. Ohalei Yeshurun, pg. 14 quotes Rav Feinstein as ruling orally that this leniency can be relied upon only under extenuating circumstances.
17 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-2.
18 Igros Moshe, Y.D. 2:82; E.H. 4:65-3. Many other poskim are lenient about yichud in a car at all times, and especially if the highway is heavily traveled; see Devar Halachah 15:1 quoting Rav S.Z. Auerbach; Shevet ha-Levi 5:202-1. See Otzar ha-Poskim, E.H. 22:35-8 for more opinions.

19 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:60; 4:65-9, based on Beis Shemuel and Chelkas Mechokek, E.H. 22:13, unlike the Taz 22:5 who is lenient.
20 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-1. Many poskim agree with this, while others are more stringent.
21 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-16. See also Minchas Shlomo 1:91.
22 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-22. Most poskim agree with this leniency.
23 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65:19. Other poskim are lenient in this case; see Chazon Ish, E.H. 34:2 and Salmas Chaim 151. See also Sha’ar ha-Tziyun 239:17.
24 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-15, based on Rama, E.H. 22:5. Most poskim agree with this. [At night, yichud is not permitted even if two men and two women are present, ibid. If two men and three women are present, Chochmas Adam 126:3 is lenient.]
25 During nighttime sleeping hours, some poskim hold that Rashi permits yichud with a minimum of four women. Under extenuating circumstances, three women are sufficient [even according to Rashi’s view], Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-20.
26 An exception to this leniency is when the man and woman involved are business associates or the man’s job is such that he must deal directly with these women, e.g., a salesman of women’s clothing.
27 Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:65-14. Maharsham 3:152 also rules like the Rambam. Divrei Malkiel 4:102 rules in accordance with Rashi’s view. Shevet ha-Levi 3:183 is lenient only under extenuating circumstances.
28 Ramban and Ran, Niddah 5a.
29 See Devar Halachah, pg. 50-52, for all of the views. Some allow yichud in the presence of a girl over age three and a boy over age five or six.
30 Children in Halachah, pg. 46-47; Ohalei Yeshurun, pg. 17.
31 Other poskim maintain that once they reach the age of nine, they are no longer considered children. See also Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:26 where he quotes, without dissent, the view of the Bach that nine is the maximum age for being a chaperon. It seems correct, therefore, that the maximum age of bar/bas mitzvah should be relied upon only under extenuating circumstances.

**Please address all comments and requests to
HAMELAKET@hotmail.com**
