**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT SHELACH**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The ten spies concluded their frightening report about their impressions of *Eretz Yisrael* by describing the intimidating sight of the tall giants living there, and said, “We were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so were we in their eyes” (13:33). The simple meaning of this verse is that the spies felt small, frail and helpless in the presence of the imposing giants of *Eretz Yisrael*, underscoring the point that they had little chance of conquering the land. There may, however, be a deeper meaning to this metaphor.

The “*chagav*” (generally translated as “grasshopper”) is a species of locust, a destructive insect that consumes produce. This is evidenced by the verse in Sefer Divrei Hayamim II (7:13) in which God describes unleashing a plague of locusts with the phrase, “*atzaveh al chagav le-ekhol et ha-aretz*” (“I command the ‘*chagav*’ to consume the land”). Indeed, the Gemara in Masekhet Sota (35a) comments that the spies knew that the Canaanites perceived them as “*chagavim*” because the Canaanites heard them bristling in the shrubs and remarked to one another that there were “*kamtzi*” – locusts – in the trees. On a deeper level, this might mean that the spies took note of the way the Canaanites spoke about *Benei Yisrael*. In the wake of the destruction brought upon Egypt at the time of the Exodus, the Canaanites saw *Benei Yisrael* as “locusts,” a large swarm of thieves who seek to use wanton force to plunder, rob and sow destruction. We find this perception some thirty-eight years later, when, after *Benei Yisrael*’s extraordinary conquest of the territory of Sichon and Og, Balak, who ruled over the neighboring kingdom of Moav, expressed his fear of *Benei Yisrael*, whom he described as “covering the face of the earth” (Bamidbar 22:5), a phrase used in Sefer Shemot (10:5,15) in reference to the locusts that destroyed the crops in Egypt. This is perhaps what the spies heard the Canaanites saying about *Benei Yisrael*. They felt not just small, but also morally insecure. They heard the people calling *Benei Yisrael* “locusts,” greedy and violent pillagers, and began wondering whether perhaps there was some truth to this charge. The scouts felt uncertain about both *Benei Yisrael*’s ability to capture the land, and also the justification for doing so. They were affected by the accusation that *Benei Yisrael* were like locusts, a foreign people plundering a land to which they had no rights or connection, and where they did not belong.

The Gemara there in Sota initially suggests that the scouts’ claim, “and so were we in their eyes” demonstrates that they were liars. They had no way of knowing what the people of Canaan thought about them, and thus their confident assertion that they were perceived as “grasshoppers” shows that they were not truthful. The Gemara then dismisses this contention, noting the tradition that the spies heard the Canaanites describe them as locusts. This discussion in the Gemara essentially highlights two different mistakes that we often make regarding our perception in the eyes of others: wrongly assuming that others think negatively of us, and wrongly assuming that other people’s negative characterization of us is correct. The Gemara initially asserted that the spies were guilty of the first, but ultimately concluded that they were guilty of the second. Regardless, the message conveyed is that we must avoid both natural tendencies. People do not always view us as negatively as we tend to think, and even when they do, their view is not necessarily correct. We must live according to our beliefs and convictions, and not pay inordinate attention to the jeers and baseless accusations made by the people around us.

(Based on an [article](https://www.facebook.com/rabbiori/posts/10154280636141323) by Rabbi Ori Einhorn)

Sunday

The Torah tells in Parashat Shelach (14:37) that the ten spies who frightened the people and convinced them to refuse to enter *Eretz Yisrael* perished in a plague brought upon them by God as a punishment. Rashi, based on one view cited by the Gemara in Masekhet Sota (35a), comments that the spies were stricken with a most unusual condition, as their tongues extended beyond their mouths and down into the navels. They were punished with their mouths, Rashi explains, because they sinned with their mouths, speaking negatively about the Land of Israel and convincing the people that they were incapable of conquering it.

The tongue is made to remain inside the mouth, where it serves its function of helping to facilitate chewing and speaking. Its biological roles are limited to the mouth, and so that it is where it belongs and where it should always remain. The image of the spies’ tongues extending outside the mouth to the center of the body perhaps symbolizes the essence of their mistake – extending beyond the role assigned to them. Before the spies embarked on their mission, Moshe gave them a list of very specific questions which their sojourn was to answer, and the specific instruction to bring back samples of the land’s produce (13:18-20). The spies erred in allowing their “tongues” to extend beyond the “mouth,” and reaching beyond the specific task they were asked to perform. They were to report on the quality of land and the types of cities in which the Canaanites lived. They were not asked for their military opinion, to determine how or whether *Benei Yisrael* would conquer the land. This was Moshe’s job, as the leader and prophet, to whom God assured that He would lead the nation to victory. Had the spies stuck to their assigned role, and not ventured beyond the parameters of their job, this calamity could have been averted. This, perhaps, is the symbolic meaning of their tongues extending beyond their mouths and “invading” a distant part of the body where they did not belong.

This might also be the intent of Rashi’s famous comments in introducing Parashat Shelach (13:2). Based on the *Midrash Tanchuma*, Rashi writes that the scouts failed to learn the lesson conveyed by the punishment brought upon Miriam for speaking inappropriately about Moshe. Just as she was punished for her negative speech about her brother, the spies were likewise punished for speaking negatively about *Eretz Yisrael*. The Midrash draws an association between these two incidents – Miriam’s speech about her brother, and the sin of the spies – suggesting some degree of similarity between them. The explanation, perhaps, is that Miriam, like the spies, extended beyond her role, and voiced an opinion on a subject that was outside her jurisdiction, so-to-speak. Earlier (12:1), Rashi explained that Miriam wrongly criticized Moshe for separating from his wife, a drastic measure which Miriam incorrectly felt was unnecessary and thus improper. It was not Miriam’s place to decide whether Moshe was justified in separating from his wife. While it may have been understandable for her to have an opinion on the subject, it was wrong for her to go around criticizing Moshe’s decision. She did not fully understand the reasons behind Moshe’s decision, and thus it was not her place to voice opposition. In this sense, her sin resembled that of the spies, who extended beyond the role to which they were assigned and assumed the right to speak out on matters about which they were not asked or meant to decide.

These unfortunate incidents thus remind us of the importance of recognizing our limits, and knowing when voicing an opinion is inappropriate and arrogant. We must try to identify our particular roles, where our talents and skills can be best applied, and then focus our attention on those areas, rather than allowing our “tongues” to extend to places where they were never meant to go.

Monday

Parashat Shelach concludes with the *mitzva* of *tzitzit*, which requires affixing strings to the corners of a four-cornered garment which one wears. The Gemara in Masekhet Menachot (39b) cites a debate among the *Amoraim* as to whether the Torah obligation of *tzitzit* applies to garments made from all materials, or only to specific materials. According to one view, which is based on a *berayta*, the Torah obligation applies only to garments made from wool or flax. The basis for this view is the fact that in the context of the laws regarding *tzara’at* infections that appear on garments, the Torah specifies that this law applies only to wool and flax garments (Vayikra 13:47). According to this view, the specification of wool and fax in the context of *tzara’at* establishes the definition of the generic word “*beged*” (“garment”) throughout the Torah, as referring only to wool or flax garments. Therefore, when the Torah commands affixing *tzitzit* to one’s “*beged*” (Bamidbar 15:38), it requires affixing *tzitzit* only to wool and flax garments. Affixing *tzitzit* to garments made from other materials, according to this opinion, is required only by force of Rabbinic enactment.

Rava, however, disagrees. In his view, four-cornered garments made from any material require *tzitzit* on the level of Torah obligation. Rava notes the phrase in Parashat Shelach (15:38) which describes the *tzitzit* strings with the phrase “*tzitzit ha-kanaf*” – “the string of the corner,” and he suggests that this phrase implies a resemblance between the string and the garment. Specifically, the *tzitzit* strings must be made from the same material as the garment. However, in Sefer Devarim (22:11-12), the Torah juxtaposes the *mitzva* of *tzitzit* with the prohibition of wearing wool and flax together (*sha’atnez*), and Rava understood this pair of verses as indicating that the *tzitzit* strings should be made specifically from wool or flax. To reconcile these verses, Rava explains that wool and flax *tzitzit* strings may be used for a garment of any material, whereas *tzitzit* strings made from another material may be used only for a garment made from that material. Underlying Rava’s position is the assumption that the Biblical obligation of *tzitzit* applies to garments of all materials, and not just to wool and flax garments.

The *Rishonim* debate the question of which view is to be accepted as normative *Halakha*. *Tosefot*, commenting on the Gemara’s discussion there in Masekhet Menachot, write that Rashi and Rabbenu Tam both accepted Rava’s position, that the Torah obligation of *tzitzit* applies to garments of all materials. By contrast, the Rif (there in Menachot) and the Rambam (Hilkhot Tzitzit 2:3) accepted Rav Nachman’s position, limiting the Torah obligation to wool and flax garments.

This debate continues in the *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 9:1), as well, as the *Mechaber* (Rav Yosef Karo, author of the *Shulchan Arukh*) accepts the view of the Sephardic Rishonim, that the Biblical obligation does not apply to materials other than wool and flax. The Rama, representing the Ashkenazic tradition, follows the view of Rashi and Rabbenu Tam, that the Torah obligation of *tzitzit* applies equally to garments of all materials.

In light of this controversy, several halakhic authorities maintained that it is preferable to wear specifically a wool garment for fulfilling the *mitzva* of *tzitzit*. In their view, not only should one wear a woolen *tallit* for prayer, but one’s *tallit katan* – the garment worn under one’s shirt – should also be made of wool, so that one fulfills the *mitzva* on the level of Torah law according to all opinions. This is the view of the Chafetz Chaim, in his *Mishna Berura* (9:5).

Interestingly, however, it is reported that the Vilna Gaon would wear a *tallit katan* made from cotton, and not from wool (*Ma’aseh Rav*, 17). Seemingly, this reflects the view of the Rama, that no difference exists between different materials with regard to the Torah obligation of *tzitzit*.

We will *iy”H* continue our discussion of this topic tomorrow.

Tuesday

Yesterday, we noted the debate among the halakhic authorities as to whether the Torah obligation of *tzitzit* is limited to wool and flax garments, or applies to all garments. The *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 9:1), based on the position of the Rif and the Rambam, ruled that the Torah requires affixing *tzitzit* strings specifically to wool and flax garments; other garments require *tzitzit* only by force of Rabbinic enactment. The Rama, however, follows the view of Rashi and Rabbenu Tam requiring *tzitzit* for all four-cornered garments on the level of Torah obligation. As we saw, numerous halakhic authorities, including the *Mishna Berura* (9:5), maintained that in light of these different views, it is preferable to wear specifically a woolen *tallit katan* in order to fulfill the *mitzva* on the level of Torah law according to all opinions.

There is some discussion concerning the position of the Vilna Gaon in this regard. We noted yesterday that as recorded in *Ma’aseh Rav* (17), the Vilna Gaon reportedly wore a cotton *tallit katan*, a practice which is seemingly based upon the view of the Rama, that the Torah obligation of *tzitzit* draws no distinction between different materials. However, Rav Asher Weiss, in [his discussion of this topic](http://www.torahbase.org/%D7%9E%D7%A6%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%A6%D7%99%D7%A6%D7%99%D7%AA/), cites those who argue that the Gaon did not, in fact, accept the Rama’s ruling. They claim that the Gaon wore a cotton *tallit katan* because he also wore a woolen *tallit gadol* over his clothing the entire day. Since he fulfilled the Torah obligation of *tzitzit* through his woolen *tallit gadol*, he specifically wore a cotton *tallit katan* under his clothing, so he could fulfill the entire day both the Biblical obligation of *tzitzit* and the Rabbinic extension of the *mitzva*. According to this theory, the Gaon in fact embraced the view of the *Shulchan Arukh*, and wore a cotton *tallit katan* so that he can fulfill the Rabbinic requirement in addition to the Biblical obligation which he fulfilled throughout the day by wearing his *tallit gadol*. As such, his practice does not set a precedent that may be followed by those who do not wear a *tallit gadol* the entire day.

Rav Weiss, in a brief parenthetical remark, questions the rationale behind this theory. Why, he asks, would there be any special value to specifically fulfilling *tzitzit* on the lower level of Rabbinic obligation? If the Gaon saw fit to wear two four-cornered garments throughout the entire day so he can fulfill the *mitzva* twice, rather than just once, then it would seem preferable to wear two garments that require *tzitzit* on the level of Torah law. Once he sought to increase his *mitzva* fulfillment by wearing multiple garments, he would, presumably, wish to achieve the higher level of performance by ensuring that both garments required *tzitzit* by force of the Torah’s command, and not merely by force of Rabbinic enactment. The notion that there value to specifically wearing a garment that requires *tzitzit* on the lower level of *de-rabbanan* (Rabbinic enactment) seems difficult to understand.

Rav Weiss adds that there are also those who proposed a different explanation of the Gaon’s practice. Possibly, the Gaon wore a flax undergarment beneath his *tallit katan*, and for this reason he specifically did not wear a woolen *tallit katan*. He may have felt that the prohibition of *sha’atnez*, which forbids wearing a garment made from both wool and flax, forbids even wearing a woolen garment directly on top of a flax garment. While it is commonly assumed that the *sha’atnez* prohibition applies only to wool and flax woven together, the Gaon may have felt that a woolen garment and flax garment worn one over the other qualify as *sha’atnez*.Thus, his decision to wear a cotton *tallit katan* may be entirely unrelated to the debate between the *Shulchan Arukh* and the Rama, as it stems from concerns of *sha’atnez*.

Wednesday

The *mitzva* of *tzitzit* requires affixing *tzitzit* strings to the corners of four-cornered garments that one wears. Tosefot, in Masekhet Nidda (61b), assert that this obligation applies only when one receives “*hana’at levisha*” – physical benefit from wearing the garment. If, for example, a clothing merchant wraps a four-cornered garment around his body as he peddles, for the purpose of trying to sell it, he is not required to affix *tzitzit* strings to the garment, as he does not wear the garment for physical benefit. Similarly, the *Beit Yosef* (O.C. 11) writes that a cloak worn strictly as a sign of distinction, but not for any sort of physical benefit, does not require *tzitzit*.

Rav Elchanan Wasserman, in *Kovetz Shiurim* (vol. 2, 23:8), raises the question as to how, according to this view, we fulfill the *mitzva* of *tzitzit* nowadays with four-cornered garments produced especially for the purpose of fulfilling the *mitzva*. Both our *tallit gadol*, which we wear during the morning prayer service, and the *tallit katan*, which we wear under our clothing throughout the day, are made specifically for the *mitzva* of *tzitzit*, and not for comfort or warmth. Seemingly, according to Tosefot’s position, we cannot fulfill the *mitzva* with such garments, as they are not worn for the sake of physical benefit. The question thus arises as to how we can defend the widespread practice to recite the *berakha* (“*al mitzvat tzitzit*” or “*le-hit’ateif be-tzitzit*”) over the *mitzva* when putting on these garments.

Rav Elchanan initially suggests that indeed, our practice cannot be reconciled with Tosefot’s position, and is based on a different view, that *tzitzit* are required anytime one benefits from the garment, even if the garment is not made for this purpose. However, Rav Elchanan then notes that we do not, generally, derive any physical benefit from our *tallit gadol* or *tallit katan*, and thus the question remains as to how we fulfill the *mitzva* with these garments.

[Rav Asher Weiss](http://www.torahbase.org/%D7%9E%D7%A6%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%A6%D7%99%D7%A6%D7%99%D7%AA/) addresses this question and answers by postulating a general theory regarding the qualifications of a *cheftza shel mitzva* (“*mitzva* object”). He asserts that whenever an object is specifically produced for the sake of a certain *mitzva*, this intention suffices for the object to be valid for use for that *mitzva*. Even if *Halakha* generally requires some other intent for the object to be suitable, this intent is not needed if the object was made specifically for the sake of the *mitzva*. Thus, even if Tosefot and the *Beit Yosef* are correct, that a garment is subject to the *tzitzit* obligation only if it is made for physical comfort, this condition applies only to garments that are not made specifically for the sake of the *mitzva* of *tzitzit*. Our *tallit gadol* and *tallit katan*, which are, quite obviously, produced especially for the fulfillment of the *mitzva*, qualify even though they are not made for comfort.

Rav Weiss points to other examples, as well, including the obligation of *sukka*. The Gemara in Masekhet Sukka (8b) establishes that a hut constructed for pedestrian purposes, such as those made by guards and shepherds, are suitable for the *mitzva* of *sukka* (assuming, of course, they have all the required properties of a *sukka*), despite their not being constructed for the sake of the *mitzva*. The only condition, the Gemara states, is that the hut was built for the purpose of providing shade, as opposed to privacy or security (such as camouflage or storage). Clearly, this condition, that the *sukka* must be constructed for the purpose of providing shade, is not required if a *sukka* is built for the sake of the *mitzva*. Rashi, earlier in Masekhet Sukka (2b), writes explicitly that a *sukka* constructed for the sake of the *mitzva* does not have to be made specifically for shade, and this is also obvious from the very fact that we do not use our *sukkot* for anything other than the *mitzva*. Once again, the *mitzva* object – the *sukka* – is suitable for the *mitzva* once it was produced for this purpose, even though it would otherwise require some other intent.

A third example cited by Rav Weiss is the candle upon which we recite the *berakha* of “*borei me’orei ha-eish*” at *havdala* on Motza’ei Shabbat. The *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 298:11-12) rules explicitly that this *berakha* may be recited only on a candle that was kindled to provide illumination, as opposed to candles lit for decoration, or memorial candles lit in honor of a deceased person. Of course, we recite the *berakha* over candles that hardly provide any significant illumination. The likely explanation of the common practice, Rav Weiss notes, is that the candle is lit for the sake of the *mitzva*, and this intention suffices. The requirement that the candle was lit for illumination applies only if the candle was not lit specifically for the *mitzva*.

Thursday

The Torah in Parashat Shelach (15:17-21) introduces the *mitzva* of *challa*, which requires removing a piece of dough from one’s batter and giving it to a *kohen*. The portion given to a *kohen* must be treated as *teruma*, which means it may be eaten only in a state of ritual purity, and it must not come in contact with ritual impurity. As these conditions cannot be met nowadays, the portion of dough removed and designated as *challa* is generally burned, or wrapped and discarded.

As *challa* shares the halakhic properties of *teruma*, it is subject to a unique stringency relevant to *bittul* – negation by the majority in a mixture. If a piece of dough designated as *challa* is mixed with regular dough, the entire mixture becomes forbidden unless the *challa* comprises a proportion of less than 1/100th. If the *challa* comprises 1/100th or more of the mixture, then the entire mixture has the status of *challa* and is thus forbidden for consumption. This ruling is codified and discussed by the *Shulchan Arukh* (Y.D. 323).

The Rama, citing earlier sources, writes that in such a case, there is a way of circumventing the prohibition and preserving the batter. Namely, one can perform *hatarat nedarim* – the annulment of his “vow” – to retroactively annul his designation of the portion of dough as *challa*. Just as one who takes a vow can, in most circumstances, have the vow annulled by approaching a scholar or *Beit Din* and explaining that he regrets taking the vow, similarly, one can annul his designation of a portion of food as *teruma* or *challa* through the same procedure. And thus if a portion of *challa* mixes with a large batter, one can avoid having to discard the entire batter by retroactively annulling his designation of that portion as *challa*. Of course, he must then remove a new portion to fulfill the *challa* obligation.

However, the Rama specifies that this solution is effective only if nobody had yet partaken of the mixture. Once the batter was baked and some of it was eaten, one may not have the *challa* designation annulled. The reason, as the Rama explains elsewhere (in *Darkhei Moshe*), is because if the designation is retroactively annulled after one has partaken of the food, then he will have ended up eating *tevel* – food from which the required tithes and other gifts were not all taken. Since the dough will now not have had *challa* removed, it retroactively assumes the status of *tevel*, which is forbidden for consumption. It is preferable to be in violation of eating a mixture containing *challa* than to be in violation of eating *tevel*, because, as the *Shakh* (323:6) explains, there are some halakhic authorities who permit a mixture containing a minority component of *challa*, even if the proportion exceeds 1:101. Although *Halakha* does not follow this view, nevertheless, the fact that such a position exists makes it preferable to eat a mixture containing a small quantity of *challa* than to be in violation of *tevel*.

Several centuries later, however, another halakhic scholar found a solution even for situations where one partook of the mixture before the *challa* designation was annulled. Rav Chaim Elazar Wachs, in his *Nefesh Chaya* (Y.D. 91), advises that instead of annulling altogether the designation of a portion of dough as *challa*, one can annul the designation of the vast majority of that portion as *challa*. The result of this annulment would be that most of the piece that had been designated as *challa* retroactively loses its status as *challa*, but a small percentage of that piece retains its *challa* status. Therefore, since a small portion of the dough has, even in the end, been designated as *challa*, the batter is not considered *tevel*. And, since the portion designated as *challa* is minuscule, it certainly comprises less than 1/100th of the mixture, and so the entire mixture is permissible for consumption.

Friday

The Torah in Parashat Shelach discusses the obligation of *nesakhim* – the wine libations that were to accompany animal sacrifices. At one point in the context of this discussion, the Torah describes the wine libation as “*ishei rei’ach nicho’ach le-Hashem*” (15:10), a phrase frequently used to describe sacrifices which are pleasing to, and accepted by, God.

The word “*ishei*” is commonly understood as a reference to the fire on the altar (a derivative of the word *eish* – “fire”), and thus the phrase “*ishei rei’ach nicho’ach le-Hashem*” is generally interpreted to mean, “an offering on fire, a pleasing fragrance to the Lord.” If so, then the use of the word “*ishei*” in the context of the *nesakhim* would seem to suggest that the wine libations were poured on the top of the altar, onto the fire, just as sacrifices were placed on the fire. Since the Torah describes the *nesakhim* as an “*ishei*,” we must seemingly conclude that the wine was poured on the fire.

This is, indeed, one view cited by the Gemara in Masekhet Zevachim (91b). Rabbi Akiva, however, disagreed, and maintained that the wine could not be poured onto the fire. After all, the Torah in Sefer Vayikra (6:6) explicitly forbids extinguishing the fire on the altar, and pouring wine over the altar would have the effect of extinguishing some of the fire. Rabbi Akiva therefore maintained that the wine libations were poured into the special pipes built into the side of the altar, and not on the fire. This is also the position of the *Sifrei*, which adds that the expression “*ishei rei’ach nicho’ach le-Hashem*” refers to the fact that God derives satisfaction, as it were, from our fulfilling His commands. The Tosafists, in the *Moshav Zekeinim* Torah commentary, explain this to mean that the wine libation is considered as though it had been placed on the fire as a sacrifice, even though it was not actually placed on the fire, since it was poured in accordance with God’s will. (Malbim understands the *Sifrei*’s comment differently, explaining that when the libation is poured as required through the pipes alongside the altar, then God willingly accepts the animal sacrifice that is placed on the fire.)

There are times when an “offering” which we wish to bring to God, an inherently religious act that we seek to perform, will have the effect of “extinguishing” the “fire,” of doing more harm than good. Even if something outwardly appears spiritually meaningful, and intrinsically is spiritually meaningful, it must be avoided if its long-term impact is damaging to our beliefs, values and efforts to serve God. For example, one might intuitively assume that he brings an “offering” to God by angrily repudiating and denigrating somebody who violates His will, but very often, this will have an “extinguishing” effect, diminishing from the “fire” of Torah. Rather than serve the purpose of advancing the cause of religious observance, a furious response will, in many instances, undermine this cause. Under such circumstances, when we abstain from bringing an “offering” due to the concern of “extinguishing” the “flame” of spirituality, we are reassured that our decision is an “*ishei rei’ach nicho’ach le-Hashem*,” a meaningful “offering” in its own right. Abstaining from an inherently religious act that would have a religiously adverse effect is as significant an “offering” as a worthwhile religious act which we perform. The lesson being taught is that we must carefully consider the full range of implications of every “offering” we wish to bring, and to ensure that it will serve to further the religious ideals that we hold dear, and not have the effect of “extinguishing” those ideals.

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