**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT SHELACH**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The final verses of Parashat Shelach discuss the *mitzva* of *tzitzit*, the requirement to affix strings to the corners of a four-cornered garment which one wears. This command includes the specific obligation to include on each corner one thread dyed with *tekheilet* – a product extracted from a certain species of snail. As indicated by *Megilat Ester* (1:6), which mentions *tekheilet* in its description of the extravagant tapestries which adorned Achashveirosh’s feast for his servants, this dye seems to have been relatively expensive and difficult to obtain, and thus signified royalty.

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 61b and elsewhere) relates that there was a cheap imitation of *tekheilet* called *kala ilan* – commonly identified as indigo – which some unscrupulous individuals would use instead of *tekheilet*. In order to avoid the cost and difficulty entailed in obtaining *tekheilet*, they would instead dye the *tzitzit* threads with the cheap, readily-available *kala ilan* material, and present themselves as devout Jews wearing *tekheilet*. The Gemara warns that God punishes those who wear *kala ilan* pretending it is *tekheilet*.

The Gemara’s comment, as many have noted, reflects the severity of false displays of piety, of intentionally projecting a false image of devoutness without sincere dedication. Wearing *kala ilan* is but one example of the general phenomenon of religious charades, of people making a point of appearing committed without actually being committed.

[Rabbi Norman Lamm](https://archives.yu.edu/gsdl/collect/lammserm/index/assoc/HASH0194.dir/doc.pdf), citing Rav Avraham Chen (*Be-malkhut Ha-yahadut*, vol. 2, p. 161), observed the opposite phenomenon – of people wearing “*tekheilet*” but appearing to wear “*kala ilan*.” He writes:

*God not only will punish the hypocrite who passes off the artificial as genuine, but He also dislikes the coward who disguises the authentic as the inauthentic. In other words, there is a strong, neurotic tendency for some people to have the courage only of other people’s opinions -- but not their own! They are afflicted with a moral weakness: they are ashamed of their elementary decency, they are apprehensive lest they have too good a reputation; they are fearful lest their virtue prove anti-social.*

Rabbi Lamm proceeds to give several examples of people who are too insecure to show their devoutness, to affirm their commitment to God’s laws. Fearful of being ridiculed, challenged or disdained, they hide their “*tekheilet*” – their sincere religious convictions – and misrepresent their *mitzva* observance, giving false “excuses” for their acts of *mitzva* observance, so they would not be “accused” of being religiously committed. Rabbi Lamm writes: “…it is a blasphemy and a desecration of the Divine Image to disown your own innate nobility, to deny your inner genuineness. We must, by all means, show our true colors.” We must be proud of our “*tekheilet*,” of the goodness within us, and never be embarrassed to allow it to shine.

Just as it is wrong to project a false image of religious devotion, so is it wrong to hide our genuine religious devotion out of shame. Of course, we should not be going out of our way to display our virtues. But neither should we be going out of our way to conceal them. We should conduct ourselves with pride and confidence in our religious beliefs and lifestyle, and not feel a need to misrepresent our “*tekheilet*,” our genuine commitment, as “*kala ilan*,” as something cheap and superficial.

Sunday

The Torah in Parashat Shelach tells the story of the twelve scouts who were sent to survey the Land of Israel in advance of what was to be *Benei Yisrael*’s imminent entry into the land. Ten of the scouts decided to discourage *Benei Yisrael* from proceeding, warning them of the military power of the nations inhabiting the land at the time.

In telling of the scouts’ excursion through the land, the Torah writes, “*Va-ya’alu va-Negev va-yavo ad Chevron*” – literally, “They went up to the Negev, and he came to Chevron” (13:22). The Gemara in Masekhet Sota (34b) famously explains the shift to the singular form (“**he** came to Chevron”) to mean that only one of the spies toured Chevron during this excursion. This was one of the two dissenting scouts – Kaleiv – who, the Gemara teaches, went to Chevron to visit the graves of the patriarchs, who are buried in the *Makhpeila* cave outside the city. Specifically, Kaleiv prayed for the strength to withstand the pressure to join his fellow scouts in their effort to convince *Benei Yisrael* not to proceed into their ancestral homeland.

Rav Menachem Bentzion Sacks, in his *Menachem Tziyon*, comments that this tradition regarding Kaleiv’s visit to Chevron should perhaps be understood off the backdrop of the Torah’s emphasis in this context on the three imposing giants who lived in – and, apparently, ruled – Chevron at that time. The Torah here informs us that Chevron was inhabited during this period by three “*yelidei ha-anak*” – “children of giants,” named Achiman, Sheishai and Talmai. The Gemara (there in Masekhet Sota) says that these giants made “ditches” and “furrows” in the ground on which they treaded, due to their enormous size, and that they were so tall that they appeared to “encircle the sun.” These men had an impressive and imposing presence that immediately caught the attention of everybody around them, and instilled within everyone fear and reverence. Significantly, Kaleiv visited Chevron in order to express his respect and reverence for three different giants – Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, the giants of the spirit, from whom our nation has always drawn faith and inspiration. Chevron was known among the Canaanites for the three giants who controlled the population, but for Kaleiv, Chevron was the site of a small cave where three righteous men were interred centuries earlier. In Kaleiv’s eyes, these were the true “giants” of Chevron.

The Gemara here teaches the importance of avoiding being misled by superficial appearances, to be more impressed by, and attracted to, spiritual achievement than physical prowess. In a world which tends to admire those with qualities such as appearance, wealth or athletic skill, we are challenged to direct our admiration and awe towards “Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov,” towards people of moral and religious greatness, rather than towards “Achiman, Sheishai and Talmai” – people who appear impressive but hardly represent the values that we, as Torah Jews, hold dear.

Monday

The Torah in the beginning of Parashat Shelach lists the names of the twelve scouts sent by Moshe to observe *Eretz Yisrael*, which included his close disciple and attendant – Yehoshua. We are told (13:8,16) that Yehoshua’s name had been “Hoshei’a,” but Moshe renamed him “Yehoshua.” The Gemara (Sota 34b), as Rashi (13:16) cites, explains that this name expressed Moshe’s prayer, “*Y-ah yoshi’akha*” – “God shall save you,” wishing that Yehoshua would be saved by his fellow scouts’ scheme to discourage the people from proceeding into the land.

This comment by the Gemara gives rise to several difficult questions, as it presumes that Moshe already knew what the scouts had in mind when he sent them. Besides the obvious question of why he sent the scouts if he knew their intentions (considering the Gemara’s other comment there in Sota, that God did not actually command Moshe to send the scouts), we must also ask why Moshe prayed only for Yehoshua. If Moshe knew the scouts were planning to arouse the people’s fear and discourage them from entering the land, then why did he pray that God should give Yehoshua the wherewithal to resist the pressure, instead of praying that He show all the scouts the evil of their scheme?

Intuitively, we might explain that the doctrine of free will, God’s granting every individual the right to choose between right and wrong, does not allow for praying that people make the right decisions. God does not interfere with people’s ability to choose, and so Moshe could not pray that the scouts who wished to betray their mission should change their minds. He prayed only that Yehoshua, who was not party to this scheme, would have the strength and fortitude to withstand the pressure that the other scouts would impose. This was a prayer for strength, and not a prayer that somebody should make the correct decision – a prayer which has no value, as God does not interfere with a person’s decision making.

Rav Yitzchak of Vorka adds a different insight. He proposed that Yehoshua’s original name – “Hoshei’a,” which means “save” – suggests that he was somebody who regularly prayed to God for help and assistance. He was so named because he frequently cried out to God. Therefore, Moshe felt he could pray for Yehoshua, because he knew Yehoshua was already praying for himself. This was not necessarily true about the others, and so Moshe could not pray for them. It is only when somebody invests effort to help himself, to build himself and to grow, that the prayers on his behalf by a righteous person like Moshe could be effective.

Rav Yitzchak Vorka wrote this to admonish those *chassidim* who asked their Rebbe to pray for them that these requests must be accompanied by their own efforts to pray and to draw closer to God. More generally, though, his comments also teach us that we cannot rely on others for inspiration. If we wish to grow and to strengthen ourselves to withstand the lures and pressures around us, we need to make a concentrated effort. Certainly, we can and should look around us for sources of guidance and inspiration. Ultimately, however, we must take responsibility for our spiritual growth and put in the effort to advance, without ever waiting for somebody to come along and lift us up.

Tuesday

The Torah in Parashat Shelach tells that Moshe’s loyal disciple, Yehoshua, had been previously named “Hoshei’a,” but Moshe renamed him “Yehoshua” before sending him as one of the twelve scouts assigned to survey the Land of Israel (13:16). As we discussed yesterday, Rashi famously cites the Gemara’s comment in Masekhet Sota (34b) that the name “Yehoshua” means, “*Ya-h yoshi’akha*” – “God shall save you.” Moshe renamed his student “Yehoshua” as a prayer that he should be protected from the pressure of the other scouts, who schemed to lure the nation to reject *Eretz Yisrael*.

This tradition appears also in *Targum Yonatan ben Uziel*’s translation of this verse, where he writes that Moshe “saw Yehoshua’s humility” and therefore prayed on his behalf. This appears to mean that Yehoshua’s exceptional humility made Moshe concerned that he might fall prey to the influence of his fellow scouts, and so Moshe prayed for his students.

However, a much different explanation of *Targum Yonatan*’s comments is suggested by Rav Shaul Yedidya of Modzitz, in his *Yisa Berakha*. He suggests that Moshe prayed not because he feared that Yehoshua’s humility made him susceptible to his fellow scouts’ pressure, but to the contrary, because he felt confident that Yehoshua’s humility would empower him to resist the other spies. Moshe’s prayer, according to the *Yisa Berakha*, was an expression of confidence in his student, not a prayer evoked by worry.

The *Yisa Berakha* explains by noting the comparison drawn by the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabba* 16:7) between *Benei Yisrael*’s relationship with the Land of Israel, and the relationship between a groom and a bride. The importance of humility in the process of choosing a marriage partner is indicated by the Gemara in Masekhet Yevamot (63a) which advises, “*Nachit darga ve-nasiv iteta*” – “Go down a level and marry a woman.” The simple explanation of this teaching, as Rashi writes, is that one should preferably marry somebody on a lower socioeconomic stratum than one’s own, because otherwise, his marriage partner might likely look upon him with disrespect. More broadly, however, this proverb has been understood to mean that in order to find a mate, one must humble himself. If a person insists that he occupies a certain “*darga*” (“level”), and sees himself superior to others, it will be very difficult for him to feel fully content with his spouse. The spouse will, invariably, disappoint him in some way, failing to satisfy the standards of his “level” which he claims to occupy, and so he is unlikely to feel happy with his choice.

The *Yisa Berakha* suggested that this was at least part of the reason for *Benei Yisrael*’s rejection of the Land of Israel. They felt they deserved better. They felt the land was beneath them. The *Yisa Berakha* attributes this feeling to the people’s experiences in Egypt, the strongest and most developed country at that time. *Eretz Yisrael* seemed to them inferior, beneath their standards, and this, according to the *Yisa Berakha*, is what led them to reject the land where our nation was and is destined to settle.

For this reason, the *Yisa Berakha* writes, Moshe expressed his confidence that Yehoshua, an especially humble individual, would not be lured to participate in his fellow scouts’ scheme. In his humility, Yehoshua did not rigidly and arrogantly identify with a particular “*darga*,” and so he was ready to “marry” and fully embrace the land destined for *Am Yisrael*, without feeling that he deserves something better*.*

Arrogance can make us rigid and unyielding, refusing to accept even the perfectly acceptable, because we will always feel we deserve better. The *Yisa Berakha* warns that this kind of snobbery can cause us to squander many precious gifts available to us – such as a prospective marriage partner, or even our beautiful, sacred homeland. We are urged, “*Nachit darga*” – to lower our ego, to be honest about who we are and realistic with our expectations, so we can enjoy happiness, fulfillment and contentment.

Wednesday

The Torah in Parashat Shelach (13:32) says about the scouts whom Moshe sent to explore the Land of Israel, “*Va-yotzi’u dibat ha-aretz*” – which is commonly understood to mean that they “slandered” the land. Indeed, the verse proceeds to tell that the scouts described *Eretz Yisrael* to the people as “*eretz okhelet yosheveha*” – “a land that consumes its inhabitants,” as though it is not even fit for human habitation, an accusation which would certainly appear to be false. According to some commentators, the sin of the spies lies precisely in this verse, in their fallaciously reporting that the Land of Israel “consumes its inhabitants.”

A different perspective on this verse is suggested by Rav Avishai Taharani (*Derushim Le-khol Cheftzeihem*, Parashat Shelach, 36). He notes Rashi’s comment in Masekhet Sanhedrin (81b) regarding the case of a lone witness to a sinful act. Certain offenses are punishable by *Beit Din* if two witnesses testify, but *Beit Din* will not act upon the testimony of a single witness. (Although, when it comes to civil disputes, the testimony of a lone witness against the defendant suffices to allow the plaintiff to demand that the defendant take an oath avowing his innocence.) Rashi writes that if a lone witness would come to *Beit Din* and give testimony about a sinful act, “*motzi diba be-alma hu*” – he is merely talebearing, since there is nothing *Beit Din* can do with the information. This usage of the expression “*motzi diba*” suggests that it refers to the nonconstructive dissemination of negative information. As *Beit Din* cannot act upon a single witness’ testimony, such testimony serves no purpose, and this information therefore should not be shared. Similarly, Rav Taharani writes, when the scouts toured *Eretz Yisrael* and found legitimate causes of concern, they should have brought this information to the nation’s leadership so a plan could be devised to address these fears and ensure the success of the nation’s conquest of the land. But instead, the scouts chose to sow panic among the people. The Torah refers to their report with the expression “*Va-yotzi’u dibat ha-aretz*” not because they “slandered” the land, but because they disclosed the information in a nonconstructive manner, in a way that elicited widespread hysteria and rage, rather than responsibly bringing their concerns to those who could properly address them.

If so, then the story of the scouts teaches us the crucial difference between constructive and destructive negativity. Criticism of individuals, institutions and other entities is legitimate only to the extent to which the criticism is expressed in a manner that will yield practical benefit. Spreading negativity is valid if it will lead to positive change, but not if its only result is negative sentiments, an atmosphere of anger and bitterness. The scouts, according to this perspective, were correct to take note of the formidable obstacles that appeared to stand in *Benei Yisrael*’s way, but they should have quietly voiced these concerns to Moshe, who would have then reassured them that God would assist the nation. They chose instead to use this information to rally the people against Moshe’s leadership. Rather than seek real solutions, they decided to sow rage. Disseminating negative information and criticism is acceptable only for the sake of eliciting a real process of change, but not if it is done merely to evoke fear and anger.

Thursday

Parashat Shelach concludes with the *mitzva* of *tzitzit*, commanding that we affix strings to the corners of four-cornered garments. The Gemara in Masekhet Sukka (9a) notes the Torah’s command, “*ve-asu lahem tzitzit*” (“they shall make for themselves strings” – 15:38), and interprets the word “*lahem*” (“for themselves”) to mean that one must own the *tzitzit* strings in order to fulfill the *mitzva*. Therefore, the Gemara rules, if one stole wool from which he made *tzitzit* strings, and he then tied those strings to his garment, he does not fulfill the *mitzva*.

The *Chafetz Chaim*, in *Bei’ur Halakha* (to 11:6), addresses the case of one who stole *tzitzit* strings and tied them to his garment, and he later approached the owner and paid for the strings, with the owner consenting to the transaction. Is the garment with the *tzitzit* now valid for use for the *mitzva,* since the strings are now legally under his ownership? Or, is he required to untie the strings from the garment and then affix them anew, since at the time he tied them they did not belong to him, and hence they were not suitable for the *mitzva*?

The basis for this second possibility is the well-known rule of *ta’aseh min ha-asui*, which requires that when *tzizit* are affixed to the garment, the conditions are suitable for the fulfillment of the *mitzva*. In Masekhet Menachot (40b), the Gemara applies this rule to the case of one who affixed *tzitzit* to a three-cornered garment, and then made a fourth corner. Since a three-cornered garment does not require *tzitzit*, the strings in this case were not affixed to the garment under conditions which require *tzitzit*. The Gemara therefore rules that the *tzitzit* must be removed and tied anew. Seemingly, this should apply also in the case of stolen *tzitzit* strings which became lawfully acquired after they were affixed to a four-cornered garment. Since they were unsuitable for the *mitzva* at the time they were tied to the garment, we might assume that even afterward, when the thief takes legal ownership over the strings, they must be removed and tied again. This is, in fact, the position taken by several *poskim*, including the *Kaf Ha-chayim* (11:23).

The *Arukh Ha-shulchan* (11:22), however, disagrees. He argues that the rule of *ta’aseh min ha-asui* refers to a situation where the *tzitzit* or garment is fundamentally, and not just technically, unsuitable for the *mitzva*. In the case of the stolen *tzitzit* strings, the strings are, inherently, suitable for fulfilling the *mitzva*, and it is only because the individual obtained them unlawfully that he cannot use them for fulfilling the obligation. Therefore, as the strings were fundamentally valid at the time he tied them to the garment, he does not have to remove them and then tie them anew after he pays for them.

The *Chafetz Chaim* adds yet another consideration. He notes the ruling of the *Ma’aseit Moshe*, cited in *Sha’arei Teshuva* (O.C. 658:6), regarding the case of one who stole a *lulav* before Sukkot, and then, during *Chol Ha’mo’ed*, the owner forgave him and allowed him to keep the *lulav*. According to the *Mas’eit Moshe*, the thief retroactively is considered to have fulfilled the *mitzva* – which requires personal ownership over the four species – even before the owner granted him rights to the *lulav*, because he retroactively becomes the *lulav*’s owner from the time of the theft. By the same token, the *Chafetz Chaim* suggests, the person who pays for the *tzitzit* strings which he had stolen might perhaps be considered the legal owner retroactively, such that the *tzizit* are now viewed as having been properly affixed. According to the rationale of the *Mas’eit Moshe*, it would appear that in this case, too, the *tzitzit* strings retroactively become the thief’s property from the moment of the crime, and they are thus considered to have been tied to the garment in a valid manner.

Friday

In the final verses of Parashat Shelach, the Torah introduces the *mitzva* of *tzitzit*, which requires one to affix special strings to the corners of a four-cornered garment which he wears.

The *Mordekhai* (*Halakhot Ketanot*, 544) brings an intriguing dispute among the Tosafists that might reflect different views regarding the precise definition of the *tzitzit* obligation. Rav Shlomo of Darosh ruled that if one’s *tzitzit* string ripped in a manner which disqualifies the *tzitzit*, and this happened on Shabbat, when he cannot tie new *tzitzit* strings to the garment (as tying is forbidden on Shabbat), then he may not wear the garment. Since the Torah requires affixing *tzitzit* to the garment, and the person in this case is unable to do so, he may not wear the garment until after he has the opportunity to affix new *tzitzit* strings. The Ri, however, disagreed, and ruled that the individual is permitted to wear this garment on Shabbat. Since the Torah obligates him to perform an action which is forbidden on Shabbat, this situation falls under the category of *oness* – where one is unable to perform a *mitzva* due to circumstances beyond his control, and is thus exempt. Therefore, as this individual is exempt from the obligation to tie *tzitzit* to his garment, he may wear the garment even though its *tzitzit* are invalid.

Rav Asher Weiss, in [a lengthy essay devoted to this topic](https://www.torahbase.org/%d7%9e%d7%a6%d7%95%d7%aa-%d7%a6%d7%99%d7%a6%d7%99%d7%aa-%d7%aa%d7%a9%d7%a2%d7%98/), suggests several possibilities as to the precise issue being debated. One possibility, he writes, is that these Tosafists debate the question of whether one may knowingly put himself in a situation which imposes upon him an obligation which he will be practically unable to fulfill. Rabbi Shlomo perhaps felt that although one is certainly absolved from the obligation to affix *tzitzit* on Shabbat, when tying is forbidden, nevertheless, *Halakha* prohibits him from wearing a garment that requires *tzitzit* when this requirement cannot be fulfilled. The rule of *oness* absolves one from obligations which he cannot practically fulfill, but does not allow one to intentionally place himself in such a situation. The Ri, by contrast, may have felt that *Halakha* does not demand that we try to avoid situations of *oness*, and so if the person in this case wishes to wear the garment, he may do so, relying on the halakhic principle of *oness* which absolves him of the obligation of *tzitzit* until after Shabbat.

A second possibility, Rav Weiss writes, is that the Ri’s ruling must be understood in light of his comments elsewhere. *Tosafot* in Masekhet Yevamot (90b) cite the Ri as establishing that fundamentally, the obligation of *tzitzit* takes effect only once a person puts on a four-cornered garment. The Torah in Sefer Devarim (22:12) commands affixing *tzitzit* “on the four corners of your garment which you wear,” and the Ri understood this to mean that one must affix *tzitzit* once he puts on his garment. In practice, of course, the strings must be tied to the garment ahead of time, but conceptually, the obligation is to have *tzitzit* on the garment which is now being worn, as opposed to an obligation to ensure that *tzitzit* are tied to a garment which one seeks to wear. Consistent with this perspective, the Ri maintained that it is entirely permissible to wear a four-cornered without *tzitzit* on Shabbat, since one does not commit any forbidden act. It is only the moment the garment is worn that the *tzitzit* obligation takes effect, and at that point, as there is no possibility of tying the strings due to the Shabbat prohibitions, one is absolved from this obligation. Rabbi Shlomo, perhaps, disagreed, and maintained that the obligation requires one to put on a four-cornered garment only if it has *tzitzit*. In his view, the obligation takes effect already before one puts on the garment, requiring him to put on a four-cornered garment only if *tzitzit* strings have been tied to its corners. As such, we cannot apply the rule of *oness* to this situation, because nothing compels the individual to put on this garment. At the time the obligation takes effect – when he wishes to put on the garment – the Torah commands him to ensure that the garment has *tzitzit*. Since he cannot satisfy this requirement, and he does not need to wear this garment, it is forbidden for him to do so.

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