**PARASHAT SHELACH**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The Torah in Parashat Shelach tells the tragic story of the sin of the spies, and we read that before the twelve men were sent to survey the Land of Israel, Moshe changed the name of one of them – his closest disciple, Yehoshua. Previously, Yehoshua’s name had been “Hoshea,” but now Moshe changed his name to “Yehoshua” (13:16). Rashi, based on the Gemara (Sota 34:2), famously explains that the name “Yehoshua” represents Moshe’s prayer for Yehoshua at that time (“*Y-a-h* *yoshi’akha*”) that he should be protected from the negative influence of the other spies, who schemed to convince *Benei Yisrael* to refuse to enter the land.

This explanation of the name change appears also in *Targum Yonatan ben Uziel*, which says that Moshe “saw Yehoshua’s humility,” and this prompted him to offer a prayer on Yehoshua’s behalf.

*Targum Yonatan*’s comments are commonly understood to mean that Yehoshua’s humility made him susceptible to the pressure exerted by the scouts. Moshe feared that Yehoshua lacked the boldness and self-confidence needed to resist and oppose the majority, and so Moshe found it necessary to pray for Yehoshua’s protection.

A much different, and very creative, explanation is offered by Rav Yisrael of Kozhnitz, in *Avodat Yisrael*. He suggests that *Targum Yonatan* refers here not to Yehoshua’s general humility – but to his boundless loyalty to Moshe. Earlier (11:28), we read of Yehoshua’s angry reaction upon hearing that Eldad and Meidad were giving prophecy, and Rashi, citing the *Sifrei*, explains that Yehoshua protested because Eldad and Meidad proclaimed, “Moshe will die and Yehoshua will bring Israel into the land.” Yehoshua had no desire for leadership, as his only wish was to remain in Moshe’s presence and under his guidance and tutelage, and so he angrily objected to Eldad and Meidad’s prediction. Thus, the Maggid of Kozhnitz suggests, Moshe feared that Yehoshua – who had heard of Eldad and Meidad’s prophecy – might have been tempted to join his fellow scouts in attempting to dissuade the people from proceeding into the land. Yehoshua knew that he was destined to take the reins of leadership from Moshe once the people entered the land, and so, in his great humility, he might have wanted to extend the nation’s sojourn in the wilderness, rather than proceed immediately into the land as God wanted. This, according to the Maggid of Kozhnitz, is why Moshe found it necessary to pray for Yehoshua.

Whether or not this is indeed *Targum Yonatan*’s intent, the Maggid’s interpretation becomes particularly meaningful in light of the famous theory advanced by the *Zohar* (Shelach, 158a), and cited by Ramchal in *Mesilat Yesharim* (chapter 11), in explaining the sin of the scouts. The *Zohar* asserted that the scouts – who were the leaders of their respective tribes – were driven by the fear that once *Benei Yisrael* crossed into the land, they would lose their positions of leadership. Beneath the claims of the Canaanite armies’ unparalleled might and the poor quality of the land, the scouts were in truth, according to the *Zohar*, motivated by purely egotistical concerns, by their desire to retain their positions of prominence.

If so, then the Maggid of Kozhnitz’s analysis of Moshe’s fears concerning Yehoshua becomes especially insightful. Whereas the other scouts were driven by the desire to maintain their positions of leadership, Yehoshua could have potentially fallen prey to his desire to avoid a position of leadership. The others lied about the land so they would continue serving as leaders, and Yehoshua – Moshe feared – could have been lured to join them for the opposite reason, so he would not fall into a position of leadership.

Just as arrogance can lead us to act wrongly for the sake of honor and prestige, so can meekness and inhibition lead us to act wrongly for the sake of avoiding honor and prestige. We must do the right thing without concern for our reputation, in either direction – without worrying about forfeiting prestige, and without worrying about forfeiting the comfort of anonymity. Sometimes we might need to sacrifice fame for the sake of our values, and sometimes we might need to bring unwanted attention to ourselves for the sake of our values. The Maggid of Kozhnitz teaches us that neither the desire for notoriety nor the fear of notoriety should lead us to compromise our principles, and that we must remain true to our values regardless of the impact this will have upon our social standing or reputation.

Sunday

The Torah in Parashat Shelach (15:17-21) introduces the *mitzva* of *challa*, which requires giving a portion of one’s dough to a *kohen*. The donated portion is referred to in these verses with the term “*teruma*,” and explicitly compares it to *terumat goren* – the portion of grain donated to a *kohen* (15:20). As Rashi cites from the *Sifrei*, *Chazal* established on this basis a degree of parity between the obligations of *teruma* and *challa*. Specifically, Rashi writes, just as the Torah did not give any minimum required percentage for *teruma*, and even a single stalk suffices for the entire heap, likewise, the Torah obligation of *challa* does not require any minimum quantity. Nevertheless, the Sages enacted that one should donate 1/24th of the batter to a *kohen*, or, if one prepares baked goods commercially, to be sold, then 1/48th, as discussed by the Mishna in Masekhet Challa (2:7).

Rav Menachem Bentzion Zaks, in his *Menachem Tziyon*, suggests an additional insight into the comparison drawn between the obligations of *teruma* and *challa*. He notes that these donations are the first and last donations required from the grain which one produces. After the crop is harvested, one first donates *teruma* to a *kohen*, followed by the *ma’aser rishon* tithe to a Levi, and then, depending on the year, by either *ma’aser sheni* (a portion which one brings to Jerusalem and eats there) or the *ma’aser ani* donation to the poor. After the grain has been made into a dough, the individual is then required to separate a portion and give it to a *kohen*. The comparison between *teruma* and *challa*, Rav Zaks suggests, perhaps indicates that the final donation must be given just as happily and graciously as the first donation. When people are approached to donate charity, they are likely to eagerly respond the first time, but after several requests, even if they can afford additional contributions, they might become aggravated and displeased. If they agree to make a donation for the fourth time, they are likely to do so far less eagerly and enthusiastically. And so the obligation of *challa* is likened to the obligation of *teruma* – to emphasize that the fourth donation should be given just as graciously and joyfully as the first.

Rav Zaks cites in this context the prophet Malakhi’s famous promise given to those who pay the required tithes: “*va-harikoti lakhem berakha ad beli dai*” – “I will shower you with unlimited blessing” (Malakhi 3:10). The Gemara (Shabbat 32b) explains the phrase “*ad beli dai*” to mean, “*ad she-yivlu siftoteikhem mi-lomar dai*” – “until your lips are worn from saying, ‘Enough!’” If we are prepared to repeatedly give, and share our material blessings with others with joy and enthusiasm even after making numerous donations, then we are promised that God will repeatedly give to us, and grant us continued blessing and prosperity.

Monday

Yesterday, we noted the verse in Parashat Shelach (15:20) in which the Torah draws a comparison between *challa* – the portion of dough which must be given to a *kohen* from one’s batter– and *teruma* – the portion of grain from the field that must be given to a *kohen*. Rashi, citing from the *Sifrei*, explains this analogy as establishing that *challa* resembles *teruma* in that there is no Biblically prescribed proportion that one must give. The Sages instituted a percentage the one should donate to a *kohen* from his crop (ideally 1/40th, but at least 1/60th), but as far as Torah law is concerned, “*afilu chita achat poteret et ha-keri*” – even a single stalk of grain suffices for an entire heap of produce. When the Torah likens *challa* to *teruma*, Rashi writes, it indicates that *challa*, too, has no minimum requirement on the level of Torah law. *Chazal*, however, enacted a required portion of 1/24th of the dough, and a smaller portion – 1/48th – for one who prepares baked goods commercially.

Surprisingly, Rashi appears to directly contradict this comment in his remarks to the very next verse (15:21). Noting the Torah’s formulation in that verse, “*…titenu le-Hashem*” – “you shall give to the Lord,” Rashi explains that the Torah requires giving “*kedei netina*,” or a meaningful quantity, an amount that can aptly described as being “given” to a *kohen*. Here, Rashi clearly points to a minimum quantity required by Torah law, as opposed to the previous passage, in which Rashi states that the Torah obligation of *challa* has no minimum amount.

This question was addressed by the *Noda Bi-yehuda* (*Mahadura Tinyana*, Y.D. 201), who suggests distinguishing between two aspects of the *challa* obligation – separating a portion of dough, and giving a portion to a *kohen*. When it comes the obligation to separate a portion of dough to make the batter permissible for consumption, the *Noda Bi-yehuda* asserts, there is no minimum requirement; even the smallest percentage of dough suffices. This is why the Torah compares *challa* to *teruma* in reference to the command of “*tarimu*” – to remove a portion of dough (15:20), indicating that there is no minimum amount required to fulfill this obligation. In the next verse, however, the Torah requires giving the separated portion to a *kohen* – “*titenu*” – and Rashi explains that this refers to “*kedei netina*,” a respectable amount of dough.

Interestingly, the *Noda Bi-yehuda* writes this is a novel theory that has never been suggested in the past – though in truth, it actually does appear in two earlier sources, as noted by [Rav Asher Weiss](http://www.torahbase.org/%D7%94%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%AA-%D7%97%D7%9C%D7%94-%D7%AA%D7%A9%D7%A2%D7%97/) – in the *Tosefot Rid* (Kiddushin 58) and the Maharam Chalawa (Pesachim 32b). According to this view, then, one who separates and gives to a *kohen* an insignificantly small portion of dough from his batter has fulfilled the first aspect of the *mitzva* of *challa*, and the remaining dough is permissible, but he has not fulfilled the second component – giving a portion to a *kohen*.

Tuesday

Yesterday, we noted the theory advanced by the *Noda Bi-yehuda* (*Mahadura Tinyana*, Y.D. 201) distinguishing between the two components of the *challa* obligation – the separation of a portion of dough from the batter, and giving that portion to a *kohen*. Seeking to reconcile two seemingly conflicting passages in Rashi’s commentary to Parashat Shelach (15:20 and 15:21), the *Noda Bi-yehuda* proposed that the Torah obligation to separate *challa* from one’s batter has no minimum required amount, and even a very small quantity suffices to permit the batter for consumption. The Torah requirement to give *challa* to a *kohen*, however, can be fulfilled only by giving “*kedei netina*” – an amount significant enough to qualify as a gift. This explains why Rashi in one context comments that there is no minimum required quantity for *challa* on the level of Torah law, whereas in another he writes that the Torah obligation of *challa* requires giving “*kedei netina*.”

[Rav Asher Weiss](http://www.torahbase.org/%D7%94%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%AA-%D7%97%D7%9C%D7%94-%D7%AA%D7%A9%D7%A2%D7%97/) adds another possible explanation, based on the remarks of the Radbaz, commenting to the Rambam’s *Hilkhot Challa* (5:1). The Radbaz writes that although even a very small quantity of dough suffices to fulfill the Torah obligation of *challa* – just as a single stalk of grain suffices to fulfill the Torah obligation of *teruma* – nevertheless, “if one wishes to perform the *mitzva* properly, he should give ‘*kedei netina*’.” According to the Radbaz, it appears, the Torah establishes two levels of performing the *mitzva* of *challa* – the preferred standard, and a basic standard. One fulfills the minimum obligation of *challa* by giving even a very small portion of dough, but the higher standard is achieved only by giving a “*kedei netina*.”

The novelty in this explanation, as Rav Weiss parenthetically notes, lies in the notion of a Torah obligation featuring a basic standard and a preferred standard. The concept of “*le-chatekhila*” and “*be-di’avad*,” whereby *Halakha* requires a certain standard but deems the lower standard acceptable after the fact, is familiar to us primarily from laws enacted by *Chazal*. The Radbaz seems to have understood that the Torah itself establishes both a preferred standard and a minimal standard with regard to the *mitzva* of *challa*, a view that necessarily assumes that even Torah law could be subject to the gradations of “*le-chatekhila*” and “*be-di’avad*.” (Rav Weiss references in this context Rav Yaakov Emden’s discussion of this issue in the introduction to his work *Mor U-ketzi’a*.)

Interestingly, Rav Weiss notes that Rashi himself appears to express this view – albeit with regard to *teruma*,as opposed to *challa* – elsewhere in his writings, as well. In his commentary to Masekhet Chulin (137b), Rashi writes that even on the level of Torah law, one must *le-chatekhila* give a meaningful portion of one’s grain for *teruma* – 1/50th or 1/60th of the crop. Rashi viewed these amounts not merely as a measure enacted by *Chazal*, but as the preferred standard established already by the Torah itself. It is thus entirely possible that when it comes to *challa*, too, Rashi understood that the Torah establishes two different standards of observance – a preferred standard, and a basic standard at which the Biblical requirement can be minimally satisfied.

Wednesday

The final verses of Parashat Shelach introduce the *mitzva* of *tzitzit* – the requirement to affix strings to the corners of a four-cornered garment. The *mitzva* actually consists of two separate requirements – affixing white strings, and adding one string dyed in *tekheilet* (a bluish dye extracted from a certain species of snail) to each corner (15:38).

The Rambam, in his *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* (*asei* 14), surprisingly incorporates both requirements in his listing of the *mitzva* of *tzitzit*. In his view, both the white strings and the *tekheilet* string constitute one of the Torah’s 248 affirmative commands, and should not be counted as two separate *mitzvot*. The Rambam’s classification is surprising because it violates the one of his own rules by which he arrived at his listing of the 248 Biblical commands. In his introduction to *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, where the Rambam enumerates the fourteen rules he followed in listing the commands, he writes (*shoresh* 11) that requirements which are not mutually indispensable should be counted as two separate *mitzvot*, even if they are related. Thus, for example, the Rambam maintains that the obligation of *tefillin* comprises two separate affirmative commands (*asei* 12 and *asei* 13) – one to wear the *tefillin shel yad*, and another to wear the *tefillin shel rosh*. Since these two obligations can be fulfilled independently of one another – for example, one who does not have one must nevertheless wear the other – they are counted as two separate *mitzvot*. The two components of the *mitzva* of *tzitzit* – like the two components of the obligation of *tefillin* – can be fulfilled independently of one another, and thus the *mitzva* of *tzitzit* has remained binding even after the tradition for producing *tekheilet* was lost. And yet, the Rambam counts the two requirements of *tzitzit* as just a single *mitzva* – in violation of his own rule for listing the Torah’s commands.

The Rambam himself addresses this question, both in discussing the *mitzva* of *tzitzit* (*asei* 14) and in his introduction to *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* (*shoresh* 11). He writes that *tzitzit* marks an exceptional case of two related requirements which are binding independently of each other but nevertheless should be counted as a single *mitzva*. The Rambam reaches this conclusion on the basis of an explicit comment of the *Sifrei* establishing that both the white strings and the *tekeheilet* string of *tzitzit* comprise a single *mitzva*. However, although the Rambam brings a source for his view, he does not explain why the *mitzva* of *tzitzit* is exceptional in this regard and should be counted as a single *mitzva* despite incorporating two independent requirements.

[Rav Michael Rosensweig](http://torahweb.org/torah/2018/parsha/rros_shlach.html) suggests that this unique feature of *tzitzit* might relate to the theme reflected by this *mitzva* – the theme of, in Rav Rosensweig’s words, “the unity, integrity, interconnectivity, and holistic nature of the halachic system.” The Torah states that the *tzitzit* strings are meant to remind us of “***kol*** *mitzvot Hashem*” – “**all** of the Lord’s commands” (15:39), so that we remember to perform “***kol*** *mitzvotai*” – “**all** of My commands” (15:40). The strings remind us not simply that we are bound by the *mitzvot*, but that we are bound by **all** the Torah’s commands, that they are all, as Rav Rosensweig writes, “a unified, integrated philosophy of *avodat Hashem* that together are more than the sum of their parts.”

The different colored strings thus represent the different areas of our service of God, and they are incorporated into a single *mitzva* because this *mitzva* reflects precisely the point that all of the Torah’s laws belong to a single, integrated system. Rav Rosensweig writes: “In this respect, *tzitzit* constitutes an embodiment, thus a constant reminder, that the discrete imperatives of the *halachah* also and especially constitute a unified if complex outlook on life.” The halakhic system “addresses all facets of existence” and “defines and dictates interactions and priorities.” In so doing, it “eschews a narrow and compartmentalized stance that enables one to pick and choose in the domain of religious commitment, or to assert a secular or neutral domain.”

The exceptional property of *tzitzit*, incorporating two separate commands, reflects the broader message this *mitzva* conveys – that all the Torah’s laws combine to form a single integrated system, each component of which constitutes a vitally important part that demands absolute fealty, and to which we are unconditionally bound.

Thursday

Moshe prepared the twelve scouts for their mission by asking a series of questions which they were to answer over the course of their excursion. One question was whether the nations of Canaan were “weak” or “feeble” (13:18), and another was whether they lived in fortified cities or open cities (13:19). Intuitively, we might have assumed that if the Canaanite peoples lived in fortified cities, this indicated their military might, and the difficulty that *Benei Yisrael* might have in conquering the land. And if they lived in open towns, this meant they were weak and vulnerable. Indeed, when the spies returned and tried to discourage the people from proceeding into the land, they frightened the people by describing the enormous fortresses protecting the Canaanites (13:28), viewing these fortresses as a reflection of the Canaanites’ military superiority. Rashi (13:18), however, citing the *Midrash Tanchuma*, writes that this perspective is incorrect. To the contrary, he explains, the large fortresses built by the Canaanite nations signified fear and weakness, not strength. If the Canaanites had felt secure and confident in their military capabilities, they would not have constructed large walls to protect them. An elaborate fortification system points to a lack of confidence, to the Canaanites’ realization that their capabilities were inferior, thus requiring them to live within the protection of tall, thick walls.

Rav Elya Meir Bloch (cited by [Rav Yissachar Frand](https://torah.org/torah-portion/ravfrand-5765-shlach/)) observed that the same can be said of the “barriers” we erect to shield ourselves from negative influences. Intuitively, we might assume that those with greater spiritual “strength” are the ones who manage to isolate themselves, withdrawing from society and limiting their interaction with people with different values and beliefs, whereas engagement with different people is a sign of weakness. In truth, however, it is isolation that signifies weakness and a lack of confidence in one’s inner commitment. The more a person withdraws, the less secure that individual feels in his or her devotion to Torah. Those who feel more confident will feel less of a need to isolate themselves from other people.

The point being made, seemingly, is that withdrawal and seclusion cannot substitute for genuine and firm resolve. Clearly, it might be necessary or appropriate to erect “walls” and avoid certain situations and certain forms of interactions that could influence us the wrong way. Ultimately, however, even when “fortresses” are warranted, what matters most is the strength of our faith and our convictions. Barriers offer limited protection that cannot take the place of self-discipline and a genuine devotion to our beliefs and lifestyle. No matter how many “fortresses” we build, we will always face religious tests and challenges of one form or another, which we can overcome only through a fierce, passionate commitment to God and to observing His commands.

Friday

When the spies returned from their forty-day excursion in the Land of Israel, and presented their findings to *Benei Yisrael*, they began by showing the people samples of the land’s fruits which they brought with them (13:26), and briefly extolling the land’s agricultural benefits (13:27). Only then did they describe the military might of the nations in Canaan, in an effort to dissuade the people from continuing into *Eretz Yisrael*.

The Gemara (Sota 35a), as cited by Rashi (13:27), famously comments that the spies began by praising the land’s abundant and high-quality produce because lies must be accompanied by some degree of truth in order to sound convincing. The spies cleverly understood that their gloomy depiction of the land would sound unpersuasive unless it included some kernel of truth, and so they began by specifically speaking in praise of the land – thereby making the rest of their report sound more compelling.

*Ketav Sofer*, however, proposes that the spies’ effusive praise of the agriculture of *Eretz Yisrael* might have actually been intended to strengthen their argument that the land could not be conquered. The unique material benefits offered by *Eretz Yisrael*, the spies contended, undoubtedly made it appealing to all the nations in the regions. Necessarily, then, the nations who managed to control and reside in the land must have been powerful enough to stave off attacks by other peoples seeking the enjoy the land. The special quality and abundance of food in *Eretz Yisrael* thus reinforced – in the minds of the scouts – the belief that the land is not conquerable, for only the most powerful nations could successfully defend an area that is so desirable.

Of course, this argument was wrong for one simple reason – God promised the Land of Israel to the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and He would ensure their ability to take possession of it. The fact that other people were unsuccessful in trying to control the land, or were deterred from even trying, due to the inhabitants’ military power, was entirely irrelevant, because the land is especially destined for *Am Yisrael*, and not for other nations. We might suggest that this is the meaning of the famous tradition (Sota 34b, cited by Rashi to 13:22) that Kaleiv, one of the two dissenting spies, had gone to *Me’arat Ha-makhpeila*, the Tomb of the Patriarchs, during the excursion in the land. The response to the spies’ claim is that the Land of Israel belongs to *Am Yisrael* by virtue of God’s promise to the patriarchs, and thus the inability of other peoples to conquer the land in no way indicated *Benei Yisrael*’s inability to do so.

This insight is perhaps relevant on the personal level, as well. We each have a unique set of qualities that make us uniquely suited for certain roles and uniquely capable of certain achievements. Therefore, the fact that other people have not achieved a certain goal, or have not attempted to do so, does not necessarily mean that we are unable to. Just as *Eretz Yisrael* is uniquely suited for *Am Yisrael*, making it irrelevant that other nations could not capture it, similarly, there are roles that are uniquely suited for each and every one of us, such that we must not be deterred by the fact that we do not see others filling these roles. We are all to work to discover our unique talents and how to best apply them to fill the unique roles that we – and nobody else – are able and expected to fill.

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