

# *Parshas Shelach*

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## *1. The Consequence of Spiritual Impairment*

At the beginning of the Portion Shelach, Rashi cites Chazal who ask, "Why is the portion of the *meraglim* (spies) juxtaposed to the portion of Miriam?" The Midrash answers- to teach us, "Although these evil people (*the rashaim*) saw what had happened to Miriam they did not take heed." Miriam had spoken critically (*lashon harah*) of her brother Moshe and was punished by G-d with the affliction of leprosy (*tzaras*). She needed to be sent out of all of the camps for a period of seven days. These people had witnessed the consequence of negative speech (*lashon hara*) yet they did not learn from what they had witnessed. They repeated this behavior in a more negative manner by slandering the Land of Israel (Hashem). What lesson should have the *meraglim* drawn from the incident of Miriam?

Miriam spoke critically of Moshe to Aaron because she did not understand and appreciate his dimension of prophecy. She had believed that Moshe's level of prophecy was similar to theirs. Just as they had not separated from their spouses, so too Moshe should have not separated from his wife. Hashem reprimanded her by saying, "**Mouth to mouth do I speak to him (Moshe), in a clear vision and not in riddles, at the image of Hashem does he gaze. Why did you not fear to speak against My servant Moshe?**" It is important to note that Hashem did not say to Miriam, "How could you have spoken so critically of Moshe?" Rather, He said, "Why did you not **fear** to speak against My servant Moshe." Meaning, if Miriam had understood and appreciated the dimension of her brother Moshe (as one who speaks "mouth to mouth" with G-d), then she would have revered him to the point (fear) that she could not have spoken critically of him. Miriam did not need to understand why Moshe had separated himself from his wife. If Miriam had revered her brother sufficiently she would have not questioned his behavior vis-à-vis his wife.

If the *meraglim* (spies) would have understood that Miriam was punished because she did not have sufficient reverence for Moshe, they would not have slandered the Land because they in effect were questioning the word of Hashem. If Miriam was punished for not having sufficient reverence for Moshe, a mere mortal, how much more so are those who do not have sufficient reverence for Hashem liable for punishment? Despite the fact that Hashem had promised the Jewish people that the land would be filled with blessing, they requested that spies be sent to scout it out before they entered. They believed that Hashem was plotting to destroy them by bringing them into an environment in which they could not survive. They did not understand that if Hashem wished to destroy them He could have done so at any time without the need for an elaborate plan. Hashem is not similar to man who has hidden agendas. It is clear that they reflected their own insecurities upon Hashem and thus suspected that He had a hidden agenda. If the *meraglim* had a sufficient level of reverence for Hashem they would not have behaved as they had done.

The Midrash tell us that Moshe posed the question of sending spies into the Land because it was a question of *Chilul Hashem* (desecration of G-d's Name). The people had approached Moshe and said that Hashem had promised them upon entering the Land, that they will find "houses filled

with “good” (meaning: wealth).” They had said to Moshe, “Do you not think that the Canaanites would not burry and hide their wealth? If we should come into the Land and find no wealth it would be a *Chilul Hashem*. Therefore we would like to send spies.” Moshe thus agreed to pose the question to Hashem. However their true motives were not for the sake of preventing a *Chilul Hashem* but rather it was their lack of trust in Hashem. Since they did not revere Hashem sufficiently, the *meraglim*’s view of Him was limited and thus they suspected Him as they would have another person. Just as one could mistrust another man so too they mistrusted Hashem.

The Jewish people at the time of the Sinai experience prophesized at a level which was very unique. Tosfos in Tractate Shabbos says that although the Jewish people had already said “Naaseh v’nishmah – we will do and we will listen” Hashem held a mountain over their heads in order to compel them to accept the Torah. Tosfos explains, that when the Torah tells us that when the Jewish people saw the fires at Sinai, Hashem had actually shown them the fires of *gehenim* (spiritual purgatory), which caused them to want to retract their commitment. After experiencing such a level of truth and prophesizing in a wake state (similar to that of Moshe) how could the *meraglim* not have had a sufficient level of reverence for Hashem?

The Gemara in Tractate Gittin tells us that Unkolos the Convert, before converting to Judaism summoned Bilaam HaRasha (the evil one) and Titus (Roman Emperor who destroyed the Second Temple) from the grave to consult with them regarding his consideration to convert. Both of them although they had shared with Unkolos each of their suffering in spiritual purgatory –receiving Divine Retribution first hand, they nevertheless advised him to do whatever he could to harm the Jewish people. The Gemara tells that every day both Titus and Bilaam suffer unimaginable torture in *gehenim*, yet they still do not recognize the truth – how is this possible? One could be so spiritually impaired that although he can comprehend the truth at the most advanced level, it is merely abstract and he is not able to internalize it to make it his reality. As Rambam in Hilchos Teshuvah (Laws of Repentance) states, that a person who falls to an advanced level of evil loses his ability to process information rationally (as we find with Pharaoh). However, this is not the case with the spies and the Jewish people. They had the capacity to overcome their spiritual blockage.

Regardless of what the Jewish people and the spies had witnessed at Sinai, their experience did not impact upon them sufficiently and were therefore unaffected by witnessing the punishment that was brought upon Miriam.

## ***2. Understanding the Concept of Agency***

The Torah states, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Send for yourself men and let them spy out the Land of Canaan that I give to the Children of Israel...’”** After Moshe had chosen the “men” who were to scout out the Land, he had instructed them to seek out information that would indicate the formidability of the nations of Canaan. They were told to seek out, “If there is a tree or not?” Rashi explains based on the Midrash that Moshe wanted them see if there was a special *tzaddik* in the Land whose merit would protect the Canaanite (as a tree protects with its shade). This aspect of their mission was not a simple task. How is one able to evaluate another to make a determination if he has sufficient merit to protect the people of Canaan? Evidently the spiritual caliber of those who were chosen by Moshe was such that they had the ability to make this specific evaluation. If this is their dimension of spirituality, how could they have failed so seriously by

slandering the Land?

The “men” of stature who were sent to scout the land represented the Jewish people as a whole. Rashi explains that at the time that Moshe had sent them, they were righteous. Only later when they had embarked on their mission were they inclined to misinterpretation of fact. Two of the twelve spies that were sent did not become corrupt. Yehoshua Bin Nun did not become corrupt because Moshe added the letter “yud” to his name (Hoshea). The letter yud represents the Name of Hashem to indicate that Hashem should come to his aid and not allow him succumb to the plottings of the other spies. Calev, of the Tribe of Yehudah, did not become corrupted because he went to Chevron and prostrated himself on the tombs of the Patriarchs that he should not be ensnared in the plottings of the other spies.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks- if the spies were all initially righteous when they were chosen by Moshe, what caused them to become corrupted?

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh answers with a profound principle explaining the concept of agency. When one is chosen as an agent to represent another individual or group of people, he is affected by the mindset of the one he represents – for the positive or the negative. Within an halachic (Jewish law) context he is the equivalent of whomever he is representing. Since the ulterior motive of the Jewish people to send spies emanated from their lack of trust/faith in Hashem, regarding the feasibility of entering and succeeding in the Land of Canaan, the spies were impacted by their negative intent. The shortcomings of the Jewish people, who they were representing, diminished these special people. Although the spies did have free choice (until the very end), their mission became more tenuous because of those who they represented. We learn from this that an agent’s functionability is directly linked to the intent of the one who he represents.

The Torah tells us that when Hashem told Moshe to build the Mishkan, it was communicated to him in a context that he should appoint the Jewish people as his agents. The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains the reason Hashem wanted that the Jewish people to be Moshe’s agents vis-à-vis the building of the Mishkan is so that Moshe should be the beneficiary of the reward for the building of the Mishkan (because the Jewish people were representing him as his agents). However according to the Ohr HaChaim’s commentary on this week’s Portion, we are able to understand it differently.

The reason Hashem wanted the Jewish people to be Moshe’s agents vis-à-vis the building of the Mishkan is to allow Moshe’s intent to affect the spiritual quality of the Mishkan. The Mishkan was the dwelling place of the Shechina (Divine Presence) and thus needed to be infused with the most pure and advanced level of intent. Therefore by giving Moshe the responsibility for its building and the Jewish people acting as his agents, Hashem created a setting in which this advanced level of intent would come about.

There is a concept mentioned in the Gemara which is referred to as “G-d’s agent.” Based on the principle of the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh, if one’s involvement in his mitzvah activity is for the sake of G-d then because the person is representing Hashem, G-d’s unlimited and infinite capacity

is associated with the person's mitzvah. If our objective of our own existence is to fulfill the Will of Hashem then all of our endeavours, whatever they may be, take on that special level.

We must ask ourselves the question – What is our objective in existence? If the answer is, that we exist to do the Will of Hashem, then we are acting as His agents, thus being impacted continuously by Hashem. However if our performance of mitzvos is for the sake of self advancement or any other ulterior motive, then our performance is on a limited level because we are not representing G-d.

### ***3. The Value of Trust***

The Torah states, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Send for yourself men and let them spy out the Land of Canaan that I give to the Children of Israel...’**” The Torah could have simply stated, “Send for yourself men and let them spy out the Land of Canaan.” Seemingly the part of the verse, **“that I give to the Children of Israel...”** is superfluous because it is known that the land of Canaan is the Promised Land. What is this part of the verse coming to add?

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the Land of Israel (as it was at the time) was in fact impossible to conquer through human efforts because of what the spies had actually witnessed. The spies witnessed giants of extraordinary dimension, cities that were fortified in a way that made them impregnable, and the nations in the land were unconquerable through natural human ability. Because they believed that the conquest of the land was going to be determined only through their own effort, the conquest was impossibility. Therefore they believed that the gift, which was being given to them by Hashem in actuality, was not a gift but a death trap.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains when the Torah states, **“...let them spy out the Land of Canaan that I give...”** Hashem is telling them initially that when the spies embark on their mission to spy out the land that the conquest of Canaan is an impossibility through human efforts and they will only succeed because “I (Hashem) am giving the land to the children of Israel.” To indicate that it is important for them to know that only in this manner (through G-d's intervention) will they be able to conquer the land and not think for one moment that it is through their own efforts. If they should consider this even for a moment they will despair and question G-d's true intent. If Hashem told the Jewish people that He is giving them the land then it is obvious that it would be without any difficulties. The Jews did not perceive it as a gift being given to them “free and clear.” They saw the Land of Canaan only as a dwelling place for giants and a location where they would meet their fate. If the Jews had understood and internalized what Hashem had said to them (that He was giving them the Land) they would not have had such a misperception. Why did the Jewish people not have the level of trust in Hashem that would have had them perceive the land in accordance with His promise?

Trust is not merely a concept but rather it is a reality that is sensed. The difficulty is - how could the Jews not have absolute trust in Hashem after being beneficiaries of the revealed miracles in

Egypt, the splitting of the Sea, the receiving of the Torah at Sinai, and the daily miracles in the desert? The answer is - that all the good that they had experienced through Hashem's beneficence was problematic to them. How is it possible that after being idolaters in Egypt could they be worthy of such kindness? Especially after Hashem had taken them as His Chosen People, they failed though idol worship with the Golden Calf. The question they asked themselves was - "Why is Hashem treating us like royalty when we are not deserving of such treatment?" Because of their sense of unworthiness the Jewish people could not have absolute trust in Hashem. They believed that ultimately Hashem would destroy them. Because of their lack of trust in Hashem, they saw their entry into the Land of Canaan as a ploy to bring the Jews to their death.

The new generation that survived the forty-year trek (anyone less than the age of twenty at the time of the sin of the spies) could have also perceived the demise of the previous generation as a proof Hashem to ultimately lead them all to their destruction. All of these misperceptions are based on a lack of trust. When circumstances become incomprehensible do we suppress our own difficulties and trust Hashem or do we fall prey to our difficulties which have no resolution?

Throughout history the Jewish people have only survived because of their trust and faith in Hashem. The fate and survival of the Jew has always been difficult to comprehend. If we would focus on the statistics and circumstances that the Jews have been subjected to, there should not be a Jewish people. It is only because of the Jew's trust in Hashem that circumstance and statistics have no relevance whatsoever.

The reason the spies reported that the Land was unconquerable and the Jews believed this information as fact was because they did trust Hashem. If Calev had not prostrated himself on the tomb of the Patriarchs and asked for Divine Assistance to help him perceive the situation correctly or if Moshe did not add the letter "yud" to Yehoshua's name they too would have failed despite their spiritual level.

If a person feels that he could not earn a living unless he works on Shabbos, then he is demonstrating a lack of faith and trust in Hashem because the Talmud tells us that one's livelihood is determined by Hashem on Rosh Hashanah for the entire year until the following Rosh Hashanah. With this issue as well as all other aspects of our life we must trust Hashem to perceive reality correctly. Thus assuring our survival.

#### ***4. Why Did the Women Not Succumb to the Slander of the Spies?***

The Torah tells us that the twelve *meraglim* (spies) scouted the Land over a forty-day period. When they returned ten of them reported negatively about the Land. They had said that it is a Land that devours its inhabitants. Two of the spies – Yehoshua and Calev, said that Hashem would assist the Jewish people and they will conquer the Land. The Jewish people believed the report of the ten spies and reject that of the two. The Torah states, "**The entire assembly raised up and issued its voice; the people wept that night.**" As a result of their weeping (which was inappropriate and unacceptable), Hashem decreed, "Since you gave forth unwarranted tears on this day, it will be a day of tragedy for you in the future during which you will have reason to shed

tears.” This was the ninth of Av (the day of the destruction of both Temples and other untold tragedies throughout history).

All of the individuals of that generation who were between the ages of 20 and 60 perished in the desert over a forty-year period because they had lacked faith and believed the negative report of the spies. Chazal tells us that the women did not believe the negative reports of the ten spies. Rather they believed that the Jewish people would conquer the Land of Canaan as Hashem had said. They therefore did not perish as the men of that generation. How do we understand this?

Chazal tell us that in the merit of the “righteous women” the Jewish people were taken out of Egypt. The Jewish women who were in bondage did not despair and maintained hope that they would be redeemed. The Midrash tells us that the Jewish women, who were in Egypt for a period of 210 years, were not defiled (except for one woman). They had no interest to ingratiate themselves to their Egyptian masters in an attempt to alleviate their plight. The Midrash explains that the women remained pure in the merit of Sarah our Matriarch.

Sarah, the wife of Avraham our Patriarch was taken by the Pharaoh who wished to make her his queen. She had no interest in this despite the prestige and glory of becoming the queen of Egypt. The Jewish women in Egypt merited Divine Protection and clarity because of Sarah their ancestor. [Even Avraham, our Patriarch, did not have this level of clarity. Avraham presented Sarah as his sister when they had entered Egypt in order to protect himself from being killed. Sarah believed that this was not the proper approach because it was an exercise in futility. Ramban points out that although Sarah disagreed with Avraham, she did not openly show her disapproval. Because Sarah our Matriarch did not allow herself to be defiled, the Jewish women in Egypt merited Divine Protection and clarity. Understanding that they would eventually merit redemption, the women of Egypt encouraged their husbands to procreate and establish large families. Thus, they are the cause of the multitudes of Jews who left Egypt. This is the meaning of the words of Chazal who state, “In the merit of the righteous women the Jews went out of Egypt.” Their righteousness was that they caused the Jews to proliferate in Egypt despite the unending bondage.

Chazal tell us that the women in the desert rejected the negative reports of the ten spies. The men on the other hand believed the negative reports and thus believed that the Land could not be conquered. The women merited clarity despite the confusion of the moment because of their contribution to the Jewish people by establishing large families.

It is a known fact that without *Shalom Bais* (Harmony in the Home) between husband and wife, there cannot be blessing in the home. *Shalom* is the context for Beracha (blessing). As Chazal explain the only vessel which can contain blessing is that of *Shalom* (peace). Only a whole vessel is able to contain what is put into it. However if the vessel is broken it does not have the capacity to contain. Similarly if the relationship between husband and wife is not whole and is fractionalized, the blessing coming to them will not be contained.

## 5. Understanding the Adversity of Our Inclination to Spirituality (from 2002)

The Torah tells us that the Jewish people wanted to spy out the Land of Canaan, despite the fact that Hashem had promised them that it is a bountiful land flowing with milk and honey. How could the *meraglim* (spies) even consider approaching Moshe to ask if they could spy out the land? They knew that he would reject their request because Hashem had already said that it was a bountiful land that flows with milk and honey. The Midrash explains the *meraglim* could not reveal their true motive to Moshe which was to determine if the land was conquerable or not. Knowing that they would be rebuffed, they made their request under the pretext that they were concerned about a *Chilul Hashem* (desecration of Hashem's Name).

Their concern was that Hashem promised that the Jewish people would find houses filled with great wealth upon entering the Land of Canaan. Their concern was that the Canaanites would bury their wealth so that the Jews would not be able to find it, thus causing a *Chilul Hashem*. Therefore it was an imperative to take the initiative to send spies to locate the hidden wealth, thus causing the Word of Hashem to be fulfilled. When Moshe understood their concern he immediately became blinded, not understanding their true intent. Moshe posed the question to Hashem. Hashem responded by saying, **“Send for yourself men...”** Meaning, if you feel the need to send spies then I authorize the mission; however from My perspective I have already assured you that the land is filled with blessing. The inference of Hashem's words was that there was a risk factor if Moshe sent spies because the facts could be misconstrued.

Moshe, understanding the possibility of misinterpretation, prayed for his disciple Hoshea Ben Nur and added the letter “yud” to his name to be called Yehoshua. The added letter was to signify that Hashem should protect him from negative influences and all evil. If Moshe understood the risk of the mission then why did he only pray for Yehoshua? He should have prayed for all of the *meraglim*. How do we understand this?

The Gemara in *Tractate Bava Basra* tells us, “The Face of Moshe was like the sun and the face of Yehoshua was like the moon.” Moshe Rabbeinu's spiritual dimension was comparable to the sun because just as the sun generates its own energy and light, so too Moshe was a dimension of spirituality on his own. Yehoshua being the primary disciple of Moshe, was comparable to the moon because his dimension of spirituality was only a reflection of his teacher Moshe. Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun, so too, Yehoshua was a reflection of Moshe's spirituality. None of the other spies were at the same level as Yehoshua. He continuously was learning with Moshe Rabbeinu and never left Moshe's tent. Rashi, in his commentary on *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of our Fathers), writes that the reason the transmission of the Torah was through Yehoshua rather than Aaron or the other disciples of Moshe was because he never left the presence of his rebbe, Moshe. Yehoshua literally lived in the shadow of his rebbe.

The Vilna Gaon zt'l who lived in the eighteenth century was considered equivalent in greatness to the Rambam (Maimonides). Regarding his spirituality, he was depicted by all of the Torah sages of his time as a living angel. The students of the Vilna Gaon zt'l once commented to him, “Rebbe, we wish we would have your yetzer ha'ra (evil inclination).” To this the Vilna Gaon answered, “You would not want my yetzer ha'ra because as the Gemara in *Tractate Succah* states, “The greater one

is the greater is his yetzer ha'ra." Why is this the case? If a person's evil inclination does not continue to match his dimension of spiritual growth, then the person would no longer be in a context of making choices. Thus, the person's spiritual accomplishment would no longer have that special value. Since the Vilna Gaon was the equivalent of the Rambam in terms of Torah scholarship and spiritual dimension, then it is understood why his response to his students was that they would not want his yetzer ha'ra.

The Gemara tells us that Abayei had overheard a conversation between a man and women who had made plans to commit adultery deep in the marshes. Abayei followed them secretly and overheard how the perspective adulterer had a change of heart because he believed that it would be too difficult to maintain the relationship on an ongoing basis. When Abayei saw this man's self control to suppress his desire and not commit adultery he was astounded because he felt that if he were in the same situation he would have succumb to temptation. Abayei realized that an ordinary person could restrain himself and yet he could not. This caused him to become depressed because he realized that he was not at the level he should have been. He shared this disappointment with his colleagues. They responded by telling him, "There is nothing to be concerned about; it is only because of your spiritual dimension that your yetzer ha'ra is so overbearing. Therefore you are concerned that you would have succumbed."

With this principle we can understand why Moshe only prayed for Yehoshua not to be affected. Since Yehoshua reflected a semblance of Moshe's spirituality he was the most susceptible to the evil inclination. Moshe added the letter "yud" to Yehoshua's name and prayed for him so that he should able to overcome his evil inclination.

The Gemara in *Tractate Shabbos* tells us that if a person truly wishes to advance himself spiritually, Hashem will help him along this journey; on the other hand, if a person wishes to contaminate himself (spiritually) then Hashem will allow him to fall as he chooses to do so.

## **6. The Challenge of the Jew** (*Beha'aloscha*)

The Torah tells us that the Jewish people complained in the desert saying, "**Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge (*chinum*); and the cucumbers, melons, leeks onions, and garlic.**" How do we understand this fond reminiscence over the period of time when the Jewish people were in Egypt? In Egypt they were slaves and endured untold hardships. Their statement may be compared to a survivor of the concentration camps reminiscing over the stale bread and putrid soup that he had eaten in the camps. The question is even more difficult since the Jewish people had reached an advanced level of spirituality at Sinai experienced when they declared, "Naaseh V'nishma – we will do and we will listen." How could they even consider putting the Egyptian experience in a positive context?

The Torah tells us that the Jewish people had said, "**We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge (*chinum*)...**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "Does this mean to say that

the Egyptians fed the Jewish people fish without payment? If the Egyptians would not give the Jewish people straw to make bricks would they have given them fish without payment? Or perhaps we could understand the word “chinum (free of charge)” to mean “free from mitzvos.” Sifse Chachumim explains “free from mitzvos” to mean that as slaves the Jewish people were provided for by their masters, the Egyptians. However after Sinai the sustenance of the Jewish people was provided by Hashem and was contingent on their observance of mitzvos. If they observe the mitzvos properly then the earth will give forth its bounty. If they do not observe the mitzvos properly then the earth will withhold its bounty. While in Egypt as slaves, this level of accountability did not exist.

Regardless if their masters were the Egyptians or their master was G-d Himself, in either situation the Jewish people would have been provided for only if they performed adequately. If so, why is the accountability to Hashem more taxing than that of their Egyptian masters?

As a result of this question, there is a profound principle that can be learned. The level of accountability of the Jew is very different than that of the nations of the world. For the non-Jew it is sufficient not violate capital crimes and all that is required of him is to behave responsibly as a moral human being. However, the level of expectation of Jew is at a different level because he is bound by the 613 mitzvos which govern every aspect and nuance of his life. There is no area in a Jew's life that is not governed by the Torah. Thus he is held accountable.

The Torah in the portion of Haazinu states, **“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak and may the earth hear the words of my mouth.”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Moshe was telling the Jewish people that heaven and earth are his witnesses. If the Jew follows the ways of the Torah, then the rain will come in its time and the earth will give forth its bounty. However if they do not observe the mitzvos then they will be denied these blessings. This means that the Jewish people are continuously evaluated and are subject to Hashem's scrutiny at every moment. This unlimited level of accountability is what the Jewish people in the desert could not tolerate. Relatively speaking, in Egypt they received their sustenance “for free (without charge)” because their level of accountability was limited to their quota of productivity.

During the forty-year period, in the desert, if the Jewish people were to deviate and transgress (even to the smallest degree) the Will of Hashem, the *Midas HaDin* (Attribute of Justice) would be brought upon them instantly. When they were finally settled in the Land, every community was required to have *shoftim* (judges) and *shotrim* (officers) who were responsible for continuously enforcing the dictates of the court. If one were to violate the Torah, he would be reprimanded and punished accordingly. If a community had as few as 120 individuals it was required to appoint a Sanhedrin Katana (lower Jewish Court) comprised of 23 judges of special status. These judges were ordained through the ordination of Moshe Rabbeinu and therefore were qualified to render rulings in every area of law (death penalty, capital, corporal, etc.). The only way one was able to sin and not be punished was to sin in private. This level of vigilance and holding one accountable to this degree was unprecedented. What is the special value of accountability? Is it only to instill fear of punishment or is it something of greater value? It would not say much for society if people did not violate the law because of their concern of prosecution.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers) tells us that one should pray for the welfare of government because without fear of government, people would swallow one another

alive. Is this to say that the only reason a moral/ethical person does not break the law is because he would be punished? Rather, accountability establishes a baseline to determine what is considered appropriate or unacceptable. Accountability causes one to understand the nature and gravity of one's actions.

When the Jewish people in the desert had said that the Egyptians had given them fish "free of charge", they were reminiscing about the time they were not held accountable for their personal behavior. All they needed to do was to provide the quotas that were demanded of them and they were fed by the Egyptians. However, after the receiving of the Torah at Sinai, when the Jewish people became the "priestly, kingly and holy people", their level of accountability was of a different dimension. Hashem held the Jew accountable for every aspect of his life and if he did not adhere to the Torah, he would not be provided for. If a Jew is cognizant of his obligation, he will perform and conduct himself accordingly.

How does one maintain that cognizance? The Gemara tells us in Tractate Kiddushin, "The study of Torah is great (value) because it brings to action...I have created the evil inclination and I have created the Torah as its antidote." Thus, if one studies the Torah, he will have a sense of "right" and "wrong."