

*Yad Avraham Institute*  
**Weekly Torah Commentaries Series**  
*The Portion of*  
**Shelach**

June 18, 2009

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
<b>1. An Agent of Mitzvah is Beloved to G'</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. The Limitation of the Human Mind</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. The Yardstick for Right and Wrong</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4. Creating a Receptacle for Blessing</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5. Aaron's Contribution to the Eternity of Torah</b>	<b>6</b>

**About the Yad Avraham Institute**

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**B"H**

## Shelach

*Presented by*

**Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

**Dean**

### ***1. An Agent of Mitzvah is Beloved to G'd***

The Torah states regarding the spies, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Send forth men (for yourself), and let them spy out the Land of Canaan...’”** The Midrash states, “The men that were chosen by G'd to spy out the Land were initially devoutly righteous (tzaddikim).”

The Midrash continues, “One who is an agent to perform a mitzvah (*shaliach mitzvah*) is considered to be loved by G'd because he is willing to sacrifice in order to carry out His agency...As we see Yehoshua Ben Nun (after the passing of Moshe when he assumed the mantle of leadership) had sent two spies, Pinchas and Calev, who sacrificed in order to perform their agency. This is the reason they succeeded in their agency.” A true *shaliach mitzvah* is one whose objective is solely for the sake of the performance of the mitzvah. Seemingly, the Midrash is saying, it is because the agent is willing to sacrifice in order to fulfill G'd's Will, he will merit Divine Assistance in order to succeed.

The spies that were sent by Moshe were initially tzaddikim; however, because they had misinterpreted the events that they had witnessed in the land of Canaan they had returned with slanderous reports. In contrast, Calev and Yehoshua who had witnessed the same events, understood them within the context of G'd's ultimate Kindness. It was only because Calev and Yehoshua were truly dedicated to carry out Moshe's with complete sacrifice that they were able to process the events properly, with Divine Assistance.

There is an established principle that is communicated by Chazal, *“l'fum tzaara agra* –according to one's pain/degree of sacrifice is one's reward.” When one is willing to sacrifice and even suffer on behalf of a mitzvah, doing G'd's Will, not only is one's reward commensurate to the difficulty but also, because of that special level of dedication, he will merit a special level of

Divine Assistance. This is only true when one pursues the mitzvah for the sake of G'd. However, if one's initiative is motivated as a result of one's self-interest, he will not merit Divine Protection and Assistance. He will thus be vulnerable to the pitfalls of misinterpreting reality. The spies, although their initial status was devoutly righteous, they had gone into the land of Canaan in order to fulfill the agency of mortal man; whereas, Calev and Yehoshua, because of their advanced level of spirituality, were interested solely to fulfill the will of G'd.

There is a principle stated in the Talmud *“Shaliach shel adam k'moso* – one's agent stands in the stead of the one who had commissioned him to be his representative (in that particular context).” For example, when one appoints an agent to marry a woman on his behalf, when the agent performs the marriage ritual on behalf of the one who had appointed him, it is the equivalent of the perspective husband performing the marriage. Through the appointment of the husband, the agent is linked to him, in this context.

The Torah states at the beginning of the Portion of Shelach, regarding the spies, **“Send forth for yourself men...”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “The men that were chosen by G'd to spy out the Land initially were devoutly righteous (tzaddikim) and men of special status.” However, when they had embarked on their mission as the agents of the Jewish people they had become evil. Thus causing them to misinterpret what they had witnessed and consequently slander the Land.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks, “If the spies were all initially righteous when they were chosen by Moshe, what caused them to become corrupted?” He explains this with a profound understanding of 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 who he represents, because of the linkage that is established between them. Since the reason for the Jewish people to send spies emanated from their lack of faith/trust

in G'd, their agents, the spies, were affected negatively by the shortcomings of those whom they represented. Although the spies had free choice to see events correctly as Yehoshua and Calev had, their mission became more tenuous because of the evil intent of those who had sent them. Calev and Yehoshua on the other hand, although they had also represented their tribes, because of their commitment to G'd as His agents, they were able to withstand the negative influence of the Jewish people.

The Mishna states in Ethics of Our Fathers, "If one performs a mitzvah for its own sake (l'shmah) he is able to draw upon the merit of the Patriarchs in order to receive Divine Assistance to fulfill the mitzvah." Although the individual is only able to succeed because of the merits of the Patriarchs, he is fully accredited with the success of the mitzvah. This is because his intent had been pure and selfless. If one lives a life as an agent of G'd, then he will be considered beloved to Him because of the individuals level of sacrifice. Consequently, he will receive sufficient Divine Assistance to succeed in all of his endeavors.

## ***2. The Limitation of the Human Mind***

Rashi at the beginning of the Portion of Shelach asks, "Why is the portion of the spies juxtaposed to the portion of Miriam?" Rashi cites the Midrash that explains, "Miriam had been smitten (with leprosy) because she had violated the area of forbidden speech. She had spoken critically of her brother Moshe. Although these evil people saw what had happened to Miriam, they did not take heed." The spies should have learned a lesson regarding one's expression from what had happened to Miriam, but they did not. They had therefore returned with slanderous reports about the land of Canaan. As a result of the Jewish people believing their slander, G'd decreed that they should wander the desert for forty years. Seemingly, it is indicated from the Midrash, had the lesson of Miriam not preceded the incident of the spies, they would not have been judged as harshly. What was the lesson that the spies should have drawn from Miriam?

When Eldad and Medad had prophesized in a public setting, "Moshe will die and Yehoshua will bring them in" Tziporah, the wife of Moshe exclaimed, "Woe to the wives of prophets!" Since the Sinai event, when Moshe assumed his special status as prophet of G'd, he had separated himself from her, so too will the wives of these prophets experience a similar fate. She believed that since Eldad and Medad had become prophets, that they too would separate themselves from their wives. When Miriam, Moshe's sister, overheard Tziporah's remark,

she said to her brother Aaron, "**Was it only to Moshe that Hashem spoke? Did He not speak to us as well?**" Miriam could not understand the justification of Moshe's decision to separate from his wife. Miriam and Aaron were also prophets of an advanced level, yet they did not separate from their spouses. When she had spoken critically of her brother Moshe, Miriam was punished with leprosy, causing her to be sent out of the camp of Israel.

Although when Miriam had spoken critically of her brother Moshe, it was not with the intent of deprecation; nevertheless, she was punished. The basis for her criticism was that she had equated herself and Aaron as prophets to the dimension of Moshe. Thus, she believed she was justified in her criticism. She did not fully appreciate the difference between herself and Moshe. The Torah states after Miriam had spoken critically of Moshe that G'd responded 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?**" If Moshe's decision to separate from his wife was inappropriate as Miriam had understood, G'd would not have esteemed him as His servant. It was evident that since Moshe retained his relationship with G'd, despite his separation, it is a clear indication that he had done nothing wrong.

Although Miriam had loved her brother and sacrificed for his sake, as it states after Moshe was put into the Nile, "**Miriam stood at a distance and waited to see what would happen to him**"; nevertheless, she was punished. Rambam explains that Miriam had put her life in jeopardy at that moment in order to see what would happen to her brother. Thus, when she had spoken to Aaron, who also esteemed and revered his brother Moshe, she did not do so out of malice. She simply could not understand or appreciate Moshe's behavior. Miriam was punished by G'd because she did not negate her own understanding in a situation, which was obvious that it was His Will. Identically, the spies although they had difficulty reconciling what they had witnessed with what G'd had told them, they should have negated and subordinated themselves to His Will.

Since G'd had already promised them that the Land would be a Land that flows with milk and honey, and they would only experience goodness there, the spies should have understood that they do not have the capacity to grasp the reality of G'd's Word. It is true that the spies had seen giants and people dying. What they had reported to the Jewish people was factually accurate; however, what they had understood was a distortion of truth.

The spies had understood from what they had seen that it was humanly impossible to conquer the land of Canaan and survive in it. However, because G'd had them that they would enter into the Land and possess it, this should have been a confirmation that their perception was incorrect. It was only because they lacked in faith that they had not negated their own understanding to the Word of G'd. Had they drawn the proper lesson from Miriam, they would have not failed.

There are many events that we see in life that we cannot understand; however, every Jew must have faith in G'd and negate his own perception of fact. The Torah tells us that Yitzchak prayed for Rivka to be able to conceive a child because she was barren. Regarding Yitzchak's supplication the Torah uses the term "*vayetar*," which is a powerful expression of prayer. The Gemara in Tractate Succah tells us that the supplications of the righteous are compared to a pitchfork. This is because just as the pitchfork is used by the farmer to turn something upside down, from bottom to top, so too does the prayer of the righteous overturn G'd's attribute of cruelty to the Attribute of Mercy. G'd does not have an attribute of cruelty. It is only because of human limitation does one perceives the Attribute of Justice as "cruel" when in fact it is just judgment being rendered. A Jew, based on his faith in G'd that He is a faithful judge without inequity, knows that he does not need to understand G'd's ways. It is because the Divine is beyond the human capacity. One only needs to follow His Will. This is the lesson that the spies did not draw from Miriam.

Although it has been over 2000 years since the destruction of the Temple, a Jew must believe in the coming of Moshiach and that it can be imminent. This is because G'd promised that He will bring the Redeemer, despite the lack of our understanding. As Rambam writes in the Laws of Idol Worship, "The mind of man is limited." Therefore, the Jew must not allow his own perception of reality to interfere with his service of G'd.

### ***3. The Yardstick for Right and Wrong***

Rashi at the beginning of the Portion of Shelach asks, "Why is the portion of the spies juxtaposed to the portion of Miriam?" Rashi cites the Midrash that explains, "Miriam had been smitten (with leprosy) because she violated the area of inappropriate speech. She had spoken critically about her brother Moshe. Although these evil people saw what had happened to Miriam they did not take heed...G'd had foreseen that the spies would ultimately fail by speaking negatively about the Promised Land. He

therefore brought about the incident of Miriam before the events of the spies in order to prevent them from saying, 'We did not know the severity of the sin of negative speech.' G'd did not want them to have a basis to minimize their culpability." The spies had seen the severity of the sin of negative speech (*lashon hara*) through the incident of Miriam. She had spoken critically of Moshe to her brother Aaron. Although she did not do so with a malicious intent and the communication was limited to Aaron, she was nevertheless punished severely by becoming a leper, thus needing to be sent outside of all of the camps. The spies should have understood the severity of speaking negatively, but they did not.

The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers (Pirkei Avos) states, "One should pray for the welfare of government. If it were not for the fear of government, people would swallow one another 'alive'." Meaning that without a state of law and order anarchy would develop to the point that people would justify devouring one another alive. How is it possible that ethical and moral people would fall to such a predatory level?

It seems from the passage in Pirkei Avos that even the moral and ethical person only refrains from committing crime because of his fear of government. How is this possible? Factually speaking, within a civilized society, ethical and moral people respect the law because they recognize the wrongness and the evil of the action itself. One recognizes the criminality and unacceptability of an action if it is identified as such. This can only be appreciated within the context of accountability and punishment. If one is accountable for his behavior when it is an infraction of the law, there is a recognition and understanding that the action is criminal. However, if one has no accountability, one has no basis to see the action as evil or inappropriate.

The spies could have seen their failure of negative speech as something of minimal consequence. Had it not been for the incident of Miriam, which preceded their slander, they could have minimized their behavior by saying, "What we had done is not that terrible." However, after seeing what had happened to Miriam, despite the fact that she was a prophetess and a devoutly righteous woman, they could not have minimized their infraction. Although they were fully aware of the gravity and evil of speaking slanderously; they nevertheless did not heed the lesson and chose to act as they had.

The Torah states, "**Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities....**" If there is a community with at least 120 individuals, that community must have a

Jewish Court comprised of 23 judges (*Sanhedrin Ketana* 'Small High Court'). These judges were ordained through the ordination of Moshe himself and were considered to be some of the most advanced Torah sages. This court was empowered to adjudicate all capital, monetary, and other issues relating to the community. In addition to the court, the community had a police force that was intended to guarantee that the rulings of the court were carried out. If one were to transgress, they would be brought before the Court and punished accordingly. For example, if one were to partake of meat that was not ritually slaughtered, one would be subject to thirty-nine lashes. How does context of free choice manifest itself within such a guarded environment? The Jewish people were obligated to establish this judicial system so that everyone would be able to understand and appreciate the liability of one's actions, thus allowing him to appreciate its wrongness.

#### **4. Creating a Receptacle for Blessing**

The Torah tells us that spies had returned with slanderous reports about the Land that G'd had promised to the Jewish people. They had said, **"It is a Land that devours its inhabitants."** Rather than embracing the word of G'd, and agreeing to enter into the Land, they had said, "We will not go in." They in effect accused G'd of misleading them. As a result of this sin, G'd decreed that the generation that was between the ages of 20 and 60 should perish in the desert over a 40-year period.

After the incident of the spies, the Torah states, **"Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, '...When you will bring a fire-offering to Hashem – an elevation offering or a feast offering...or a free-will offering, or on your festivals, to produce a satisfying aroma to Hashem...the one who brings the offering must bring a meal offering...and wine for a libation...'"** After the sin of the spies, if one were to bring a peace offering, burnt offering, etc. it must be accompanied with a meal offering and wine libations. Why does the Torah choose to mention at this point in time, the meal offering and wine libations that need to accompany the one's personal sacrifice?

Sforno explains, "Until the sin of the Golden Calf, if one wanted to bring a burnt offering to G'd it was sufficient for him to bring the meat offering by itself. Although it was not accompanied with the meal offering or wine libation it was considered a fully appropriate offering. The offering produced a satisfying aroma to Hashem, as we find regarding the sacrifices of Abel, Noach, and Avraham. They had brought burnt offerings without any accompaniment. At the time of the giving of

the Torah at Sinai, the youths also brought burnt offerings that were not accompanied with a meal offering and libations. However, as a result of the spiritual diminishment of the Jewish people that was caused by the sin of the Golden Calf, when a communal offering was brought it was no longer sufficient to be brought by itself. It needed to be accompanied with a meal offering and libations. After the sin of the spies, which caused even further spiritual diminishment to the Jewish people, when one brought a personal offering, it needed to be accompanied with a meal offering and libations. It was no longer sufficient to bring the meat offering by itself." The meal offering and libations that accompanied the burnt offering after the sin of the Golden Calf and the sin of the spies were to compensate for the spiritual failing of the Jewish people. It was only with this accompaniment that the aroma of the offering would be satisfying to G'd. Only in this manner would the Jewish people be fully atoned.

The Torah continues, **"Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, '...When you will eat of the bread of the Land, you shall set a side a portion for Hashem (challah)...'"** Sforno explains, "After the sin of the spies, the Jewish people also needed the mitzvah of *challah* (in addition to the meal offering and libations). One needed to perform a positive commandment before partaking of the bread of the Land so that he should be worthy of blessing to come upon him. As it states, 'When you give the first of your dough to the Kohen (Priest), it will bring blessing into your house.'" After the Jewish people became spiritually diminished from the sin of the Golden Calf and the spies, the burnt offering alone was not sufficient to bring about atonement. They needed to also bring a meal offering and libations to be considered complete. In addition, in order to be worthy of the blessing of G'd, the Jewish people needed to tithe their dough before partaking of it. Prior to the sin of the spies, they were not obligated in the mitzvah of *challah* because they were innately worthy of blessing.

The Gemara in Tractate Zevachim tells us that when one brings a sin offering it must be accompanied with a burnt offering. The sin offering, which brings about atonement, must precede the burnt offering. The value of the burnt offering that is brought subsequently, is the equivalent of a gift to G'd. The Gemara asks, "To what is this analogous? When one sins against the king, he must first make amends to be forgiven. After one is forgiven, he is not entirely in his good graces of the king. He must bring a gift to the king to be fully reinstated and seen as a loyal and beloved subject." Similarly, after one brings the sin offering, one is forgiven and fully atoned. However, in order to return to His "good graces," one must bring a burnt offering as a gift.

Although the Jewish people compensated for their spiritual regression by bringing the meal offering and wine libations, that was not sufficient to be worthy of blessing. They were therefore given the mitzvah of *challah*. Only through tithing the dough and giving it to the Kohen, who is the representative of G'd, does one become worthy of blessing.

We find that before Yitzchak had given his blessing to Esav the Torah states, **“Yitzchak said to Esav, ...go out to the field and hunt game for me. Then make me delicacies such as I love and bring it to me and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you...”** Sforno asks, “Since Esav was the first born of Yitzchak, who was the Patriarch, seemingly, the blessing could have been given without being predicated on preparing delicacies for his father. Why did Yitzchak ask Esav to hunt game and prepare delicacies for him in order to receive the blessing? One needs to be worthy in order for a blessing to be effective, regardless of the holiness of the individual giving the blessing. Yitzchak wanted to create an opportunity for Esav to perform the mitzvah of honoring one’s father in order to be worthy to receive the blessing.” Yaakov, on the other hand, because of his dimension of spirituality and holiness was innately worthy of receiving his father’s blessing.

## ***5. Aaron’s Contribution to the Eternity of Torah*** (from *Beha’aloscha*)

The Torah states, **“Speak to Aaron and say to him: When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light.”** Rashi in the beginning of the Portion cites the Midrash, “Why does the Torah juxtapose the portion of the celebration of the Princes (at the time of the inauguration of the Mishkan) to the kindling of the Menorah?” The Midrash explains that when Aaron had seen all of the Princes participating in the celebration of the completion of the Mishkan, he was taken aback and offended (he felt that his exclusion was due to his unworthiness). G'd said to him, “Your participation is greater than theirs.” Aaron was then given the mitzvah of the kindling the Menorah.

The Torah states regarding the kindling of the Menorah, **“Aaron did so...”** The Midrash explains, “The Torah tells us this to inform us of the praiseworthiness of Aaron – that he did not deviate regarding the kindling of the Menorah.” The kindling of the Menorah was seemingly a simple mitzvah to fulfill. Why would one have considered that Aaron, who was the equivalent of his

brother Moshe, would have not performed the mitzvah in the most meticulous manner?

The Midrash states, “Aaron’s lighting of the Menorah has eternal value. Just as the Priestly Blessings (Berchas Kohanim) are eternal, despite the fact that the Temple no longer exists.” Alshich in his commentary on the Torah explains that when Aaron kindled the lights of the Menorah he precipitated and released a spiritual force that influences the Jewish people until the end of time. Although the mitzvah of the kindling of the Menorah continued as long as the Temple existed; nevertheless, the effect of Aaron’s initial lighting spanned all eternity. Similarly, the Priestly blessings that were recited in the Temple created a positive force that goes beyond the Temple period. This positive energy is available to the Jewish people until the end of time.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra tells us that the illumination of the Menorah symbolizes the Oral Law, which is the elucidation of the Written Law. The Talmud tells us that if one wishes to gain wisdom when he prays, he should pray in a southerly direction because the Menorah in the Temple was situated on the southern wall of the covered sanctuary. All the Divine Assistance that is needed to fathom the truth of Torah emanates from the light of the Menorah. That special force was initiated and established through Aaron’s kindling. It was because of his special dimension of spirituality and pure intent that his lighting had such a profound effect. If Aaron’s intent had been lacking to any degree it would have manifested itself in a lesser level of Divine Assistance, which would have affected the clarity of Torah.

Aaron, understanding the value of his contribution to the Jewish people through the lighting of the Menorah, could have had a sense of pride. If this would have been so, Aaron’s kindling would have been considered deficient. Despite the eternal effect of Aaron’s lighting, he was not affected to any degree. Consequently, his kindling of the Menorah was able to initiate and establish the most profound level of truth. This is the meaning of the verse concluding with the words, **“Aaron did so.”** This is to communicate the praiseworthiness of Aaron, that he did not deviate. Because of Aaron’s dimension of spirituality, which was similar to that of his brother Moshe, the ramification of his mitzvah transcends time and thus has eternal value.