

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת שלח

אלה שמות האנשים אשר שלח משה לתור את הארץ ויקרא משה להושע בן נון
יהושע

“These are the names of the men whom Moshe sent to spy out the land. Moshe called Hoshea son of Nun ‘Yehoshua’” (13:16)

Why was Yehoshua the only spy who received a new name from Moshe for special protection? We know that the Torah does not allow parents to show favoritism to any one child and teachers are not supposed to favor a single student. Why did Yehoshua get special treatment?

The Meshech Chochma says that Yehoshua was the general who had defeated Amalek, one of the nations inhabiting Eretz Yisrael, in battle. If he would come back and express his fear of Amalek and the other nations there, everyone would be afraid. After all, if Yehoshua, the courageous general who had seen them once and defeated them, was afraid, then certainly there was reason for fear. It was therefore extremely important that Yehoshua, more so than the other spies, should remain strong. Moshe hoped that under his influence, the spies would bring back a positive report.

By giving Yehoshua a new name and praying for his protection, Moshe Rabbeinu taught us the lesson of foresight. It is important to look ahead and prepare for situations that lie ahead of us rather than taking the approach of “I’ll deal with it when I get there.” Without proper preparation, one minimizes his chances of success.

ויהס כלב את העם אל משה ויאמר עלה נעלה וירשנו אתה כי יכול נוכל לה
“Calev silenced the people toward Moshe and said: We shall surely ascend and conquer it, for we can surely do it!” (13:30)

Rashi cites the following Gemara in Sotah 35a: Calev saw that the only way to get a word in edgewise against the spies was to pretend that he supported them. Amidst their complaints, he shouted, “Is this all that the son of Amram did for us?” The people thought that he too had something negative to say so they quieted down so that he could speak. Once Calev

had their attention, he said, “Didn’t Moshe also split the sea? Didn’t he bring us the man? If he says to build ladders and climb to the heavens, then we will be able to do it!”

R’ Dovid Feinstein asks: How could Calev say this? Is it possible to reach the heavens? He answers that miracles can happen, provided that we do our part. Calev was saying that if the people go ahead and build ladders with the goal of reaching heaven, then Hashem will take over and help make the impossible possible. When we can honestly say that we have done everything that we humanly can do, then Hashem’s help kicks in and assists us in our endeavors.

R’ Meir Yechiel of Ostrov gives a second explanation of Rashi. The spies brought back an evil report because they believed that Eretz Yisrael requires a certain level of holiness of its inhabitants and they were concerned that they would not be able to maintain that high standard. As such, they decided that it was not a good idea to go to Eretz Yisrael. Calev responded that they were making a mistake. Indeed, they may not have been on the proper level for living in Eretz Yisrael at that point in time, but such change does not be expected to happen overnight. One needs to build ladders, see the many rungs above him and climb one level at a time. Then, with constant upward progress, he will see tremendous change over time. Eventually, said Calev, they would be ready to live in Eretz Yisrael. The lesson that we can take from Calev’s words is that only if one improves step by step will his growth be sustainable.

והיה לכם לציצת וראיתם אתו וזכרתם את כל מצות ה' ועשיתם אתם ולא תתורו
אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם אשר אתם זנים אחריהם
“It shall constitute *tzitzis* for you, that you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them; and not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray” (15:39)

When the posuk says that *tzitzis* are worn so “that you may see it,” what is the “it” referring to? There are two answers to this question. Rashi writes that it refers to the strings. The strings remind a person of all the mitzvos because the numerical value of the word *tzitzis* is 600 and there are 8 strings and 5 knots, adding up to a total of 613. When one sees the *tzitzis*,

he is reminded of his obligation to do all the mitzvos. This serves as an important protection during a person's daily life. It constantly reminds him of how he is supposed to be acting.

Ramban questions that explanation. He writes that in order to obtain a numerical value of 600, *tzitzis* has to be spelled with two "yuds" and in reality it only has one. Rather, he says, "that you may see it" refers to the *techeiles*, the blue-dyed string on the *tzitzis* (which not everyone has today because the identity of the dye is debated). How does the blue string remind us of the mitzvos? The gemara in Chullin 89 writes that the blue is reminiscent of the sea, the sea looks like the heavens and looking at the heavens reminds us of the כסא הכבוד, Hashem's Throne of Glory in the heavens. In this manner, looking at the blue string of *tzitzis* reminds one of Hashem's presence and the obligation to fulfill His commandments.

R' Moshe Feinstein asks: Why does the gemara include so many steps? Why not just say that the blue reminds us of the heavens and the כסא הכבוד? The answer is that self-improvement only works when approached step-by-step (as we wrote above). One cannot leap many levels in a single bound or it will not last. One should grow gradually and then he will retain those levels as he continues to climb the ladder of Torah and mitzvos.

The commandment of *tzitzis* is followed by the story of Korach's rebellion. What is the connection between these two sections? The Midrash says that Korach approached Moshe with his followers, all wearing blue garments, and argued that a blue garment should not need a blue string of *tzitzis*. Moshe said that this was not the *halacha*. Korach said that Moshe was making up laws and that the Torah was not from Hashem. On another occasion, Korach and his followers mocked Moshe and asked him why a room full of Sifrei Torah requires a *mezuzah*. After all, the *mezuzah* is merely a representation of the Torah on our doorposts and the room is already full of Torah scrolls? Based on this Midrash, we can see how the story of Korach follows from the end of our *parsha*.

R' Avraham Yellin wrote a *sefer* called *Erech Apayim* on the subject of anger. It was one of the few *seforim* for which the Chofetz Chaim wrote a *haskamah*, an approbation. In the introduction to the *sefer*, he attempts to explain why it is necessary to dedicated an entire *sefer* to the topic of anger by citing this Midrash about Korach. R' Yellin explained that Korach was

mistaken because when one looks at the big picture, he is unable to focus on the finer details at the same time. The room may be full of Sifrei Torah, but when looking at a whole Torah, one cannot focus on the sections of Shema that are contained in the *mezuzah*. The *mezuzah* is still needed on the doorpost so that one can focus on those sections. Similarly, in the big picture of life and Torah and *mitzvos*, sometimes we do not focus on the character traits that are essential to spiritual growth. Therefore, writes R' Yellin, a *sefer* devoted to anger is a way of focusing on an important topic that is often overlooked.

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