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PLEASE NOTE OUTSIDE ISRAEL THIS WEEK IS BEHA'ALOTCHA

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Double Agents in a Minyan

This week's Torah portion teaches the grave sin of the *meraglim*, the spies. Their evil report about Eretz Yisrael still echoes today, with the repercussions continuing to be felt. Of the twelve spies sent, only two remained loyal to Hashem: Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh. The other ten chose to slander Eretz Yisrael, consequently suffering immediate and terrible deaths. Due to their vile report, the Jewish people was forced to remain in the desert an additional forty years, and eventually die out, before the children ultimately were allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael.

Hashem called this rogues' gallery of spies an *eidah*, literally a congregation. The *gemara* derives from this incident that the minimum requirement for a *minyan* is a quorum of ten men, since there were ten turncoat 'double-agents' who were contemptuously called a congregation.

If ten men can get together to conspire and hatch malevolent schemes, then ten men can assemble to form a congregation for *devarim shebekedusha*, matters of holiness. This exegesis is duly codified in halacha, and all because of the dastardly deeds of ten misguided men.

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel - Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. ohr@ohr.edu

Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller – Rosh HaYeshiva,
Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven
Chaim Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi
Moshe Newman, Rabbi Shlomo Simon, Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, Rabbi Yehuda Spitz,
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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Gittin 23-29

Who is the Agent?

Everyone is acceptable as an agent to deliver a get except for... and a blind person"

This teaching in the *Mishna* is qualified by Rav Yosef in the *gemara* to refer to a *get* brought from outside of Israel. Since an agent who brings a woman a *get* from outside of Israel must say that the *get* was written and signed in front of him specifically for her, as our Sages decreed, a blind person is not qualified since he cannot testify to that which he could not see.

However, earlier in the *masechta* (6a) the *gemara* stated that it is sufficient if the agent even only hears the sound of the pen write the *get* for her. Tosefot there writes that this "hearing" does not qualify a blind person, as we learn in our *mishna*, but does not explain the reason. One reason offered is that since a blind agent cannot see, he cannot be certain that the *get* he heard written for her is the same *get* that he is actually delivering to her, and cannot definitely testify that it was written and signed in front of him for her. (Rabbeinu Asher)

• Gittin 23a

Assumption of Life

Rava said, "That he already died, we are not worried; that he will die, we are worried."

With these words, Rava resolves an apparent contradiction posed in the *gemara* between a statement in the *mishna* and a teaching in a *beraita*.

The *Mishna* states that if a *kohen* travels overseas, his wife may continue to eat *terumah* since we assume he is alive until known otherwise. A *beraita*, however, teaches that if a *kohen* gives his wife a *get*, stipulating that it will take effect right before he dies, she is forbidden to eat *terumah* immediately. Why don't we allow her to eat *terumah* in this case as well, based on the assumption that he will continue to remain alive right after she eats, just like we assume he continues to be alive in the case in the *Mishna* in which he travels abroad?

To answer this question, Rava says the above distinction, "That he already *died*, we are not worried; that he *will die*, we are worried." What is the difference?

The distinction that Rava makes is based on the fact that his *chezkat chai* tells us only what to assume about his *present status*. Therefore, when her husband is away, we assume he is still alive at the "present" time and she may eat *terumah*. However, his *chezkat chai* does not apply to his *future status*, which is what we are concerned about in the case in which he gave her the conditional *get*. Since the *chazaka* does not tell anything about his *future status*, we cannot assume he will continue to be alive right after she eats the *terumah*. Therefore, we are worried he will die at any moment, making her a divorcee a moment earlier, and it will turn out that she wrongly ate the *terumah* at a time when she was no longer married to the *kohen*.

▪ Gittin 28 a-b

Q & A

Questions

1. Why is the portion about the *meraglim* written immediately after the portion about Miriam's *tzara'at*?
2. To what was Moshe referring when he asked the *meraglim* "Are there trees in the land"?
3. Who built Hebron?
4. Which fruits did the *meraglim* bring back?
5. How many people carried the grape cluster?
6. Why did G-d shorten the *meraglim's* journey?
7. Why did the *meraglim* begin by saying the land is "flowing with milk and honey"?
8. Why did the *meraglim* list Amalek first among the hostile nations they encountered?
9. How did Calev quiet the people?
10. Why did the Land appear to "eat its inhabitants"?
11. Besides the incident of the *meraglim*, what other sin led to the decree of 40 years in the desert?
12. On what day did *Bnei Yisrael* cry due to the *meraglim's* report? How did this affect future generations?
13. "Don't fear the people of the Land...their defense is departed." (14:9) Who was their chief "defender"?
14. Calev and Yehoshua praised Eretz Canaan and tried to assure the people that they could be victorious. How did the people respond?
15. "How long shall I bear this evil congregation?" G-d is referring to the 10 *meraglim* who slandered the Land. What halacha do we learn from this verse?
16. How is the *mitzvah* of *challa* different from other *mitzvot* associated with Eretz Yisrael?
17. What is the minimum amount of *challa* to be given to a *kohen* according to Torah Law? Rabbinic Law?
18. Verse 15:22 refers to what sin? How does the text indicate this?
19. Moshe's doubt regarding the punishment of the *mekoshesh etzim* (wood-gatherer) was different than his doubt regarding the punishment of the blasphemer. How did it differ?
20. How do the *tzitzit* remind us of the 613 commandments?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 13:2 - To show the evil of the *meraglim* (spies), that they saw Miriam punished for *lashon hara* (negative speech) yet failed to take a lesson from it.
2. 13:20 - Were there any righteous people in the land whose merit would "shade" the Canaanites from attack?
3. 13:22 - Cham.
4. 13:23 - A cluster of grapes, a pomegranate and a fig.
5. 13:23 - Eight.
6. 13:25 - G-d knew the Jews would sin and be punished with a year's wandering for each day of the spies' mission. So He shortened the journey to soften the decree.
7. 13:27 - Any lie which doesn't start with an element of truth won't be believed. Therefore, they began their false report with a true statement.
8. 13:29 - To frighten the Jews. The Jewish People were afraid of Amalek because Amalek had once attacked them.
9. 13:30 - He fooled them by shouting, "Is this all that the son of Amram did to us?" The people quieted themselves to hear what disparaging thing Calev wished to say about the "son of Amram" (Moshe).
10. 13:32 - G-d caused many deaths among the Canaanites so they would be preoccupied with burying their dead and not notice the *meraglim*.
11. 13:33 - The golden calf.
12. 14:1 - The 9th of Av (Tisha B'av). This date therefore became a day of crying for all future generations: Both Temples were destroyed on this date.
13. 14:9 - Iyov.
14. 14:10 - They wanted to stone them.
15. 14:27 - That ten men are considered a congregation.
16. 15:18 - The obligation to observe other *mitzvot* associated with Eretz Yisrael began only after the possession and division of the Land. The *mitzvah* of *challah* was obligatory immediately upon entering the Land.
17. 15:20 - No fixed amount is stated by the Torah. Rabbinic Law requires a household to give 1/24 and a baker to give 1/48.
18. 15:22 - Idolatry. "All these commandments" means one transgression which is equal to transgressing all the commandments - i.e. idolatry.
19. 15:34 - Moshe knew that the *mekoshesh etzim* was liable for the death penalty, but not which specific means of death. Regarding the blasphemer, Moshe didn't know if he was liable for the death penalty.
20. 15:39 - The numerical value of the word *tzitzit* is 600. *Tzitzit* have eight threads and five knots. Add these numbers and you get 613.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Learning the Ropes

Before the Jewish People entered the Holy Land under the leadership of Joshua, Joshua sent two spies to scout out the city of Jericho and find out more information. Those spies lodged at the house of a woman named Rahab, who then proceeded to protect them when the King of Jericho found out about their presence and sought to kill them. After the two spies escaped through Rahab's window and descended to the ground on a rope (*chevel*), they promised Rahab that if she ties a red string (*tikvah* or *chut*) to her window, then when the Jews conquer Jericho, they will spare her and her family (Joshua 2:1-22). In this passage, three different words are used for "rope/string": *chevel*, *tikvah*, and *chut*. This essay attempts to trace the etymology those and other words for "rope/string," seeking to clarify whether all of these words are truly synonyms; and if not, how exactly they relate to one another.

The Hebrew word *chut* refers to a single "thread/string" from which a larger fabric may be weaved or sown. It appears only once in the Pentateuch, when Abraham swore to the King of Sodom that he will not even take "from a *chut* to a shoe string" (Gen. 14:23) from the spoils of war. But it also appears another six times in the Bible. For example, in the allegorical love story of Song of Songs, one partner said that his lover's lips "are like a crimson red *chut*" (Song 4:3), and when Samson was tied down by *avot* (which are especially thick ropes, see below), he easily released those bonds from upon his arms "like a *chut*" (Judges 16:12). Another famous verse about a *chut* states: "the three-pronged *chut* will not be quickly undone" (Prov. 4:12), which the rabbis interpret as referring to a three-generation family of Torah Scholars, for whom Torah Study will become thoroughly engrained (*Bava Batra* 59a).

Although Ibn Janach (990-1050) and Radak (1160-1234) in their respective *Sefer HaShorashim* trace the word *chut* to the trilateral root CHET-VAV-TET, Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970) in his *Machberet Menachem* sees the middle VAV as extraneous to the core root, thus tracing the term to the biliteral root CHET-TET.

Expanding on Menachem's etymology, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) explains the core meaning of CHET-TET as "blemish/deficiency" – both in a physical and spiritual sense. Accordingly, he explains that the word *chet* ("sin") refers to a spiritual blemish or deficiency, but when King David's wife Batsheba said that if her son Solomon does not ascend the throne after King David's death, then "I and my son Solomon will be *chataim*" (I Kings 1:21), this means that they will be deficient and lacking something that should really belong to them. Taking this a step further, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the intensive verb form of this root *l'chateh* means "to clean up/to fix a deficiency or blemish" (in Modern Hebrew, it refers to "disinfecting" something). Accordingly, the *Korban Chatat* (so-called "sin-offering") is called such because it has the power to "clean up" a person who has sinned. In line with all this, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the word *chut* also relates to this core meaning, as a "thread" is something used to "fix up" or otherwise "prepare" a broken garment.

There are two words in Mishnaic Hebrew that are etymologically derived from the Biblical Hebrew word *chut*: *chayat* ("tailor") refers to an artisan proficient in working with "threads" and appears multiple times in the Mishnah (*Shabbat* 1:3, *Pesachim* 4:6, *Bava Kama* 10:10, see also *Ezra* 4:12), and *machat* ("needle") refers to the tool used for working with "threads" and also appears in the Mishnah (*Orlah* 1:4, *Shabbat* 1:3, 6:1, 6:3, 17:2, *Erwin* 10:3, *Eduyot* 2:3, *Keilim* 9:1, 9:3, 13:5, *Parah* 12:2, *Taharot* 3:5, *Mikvaot* 7:7).

As mentioned above, when Rahab helped the two spies escape by exiting through her window on a rope, the Bible (Joshua 3:15) uses the word *chevel* to denote that “rope.” Interestingly, Abarbanel argues that the *chevel* that the spies used to descend the window was the same *chut* that Rahab tied as a sign – even though the Bible uses two different words.

To learn about the other words for “tying” in Hebrew, the continuation of this essay is at: <https://ohr.edu/this-week/whats-in-a-word/>

PARSHA OVERVIEW

At the insistence of the *Bnei Yisrael*, and with G-d's permission, Moshe sends 12 scouts, one from each tribe, to investigate Canaan. Anticipating trouble, Moshe changes Hoshea's name to Yehoshua, expressing a prayer that G-d not let him fail in his mission. They return 40 days later, carrying unusually large fruit. When 10 of the 12 state that the people in Canaan are as formidable as the fruit, the men are discouraged. Calev and Yehoshua, the only two scouts still in favor of the invasion, try to bolster the people's spirit. The nation, however, decides that the Land is not worth the potentially fatal risks, and instead demands a return to Egypt. Moshe's fervent prayers save the nation from Heavenly annihilation. However, G-d declares that they must remain in the desert for 40 years until the men who wept at the scouts' false report pass away. A remorseful group rashly begins an invasion of the Land, based on G-d's original command. Moshe warns them not to proceed, but they ignore this and are massacred by the Amalekites and Canaanites.

G-d instructs Moshe concerning the offerings to be made when the *Bnei Yisrael* will finally enter the Land. The people are commanded to remove *challah*, a gift for the *kohanim*, from their dough. The laws for an offering after an inadvertent sin, for an individual or a group, are explained. However, should someone blaspheme against G-d and be unrepentant, he will be cut off spiritually from his people. One man is found gathering wood on public property in violation of the laws of Shabbat and he is executed. The laws of *tzitzit* are taught. We recite the section about the *tzitzit* twice a day to remind ourselves of the Exodus.

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COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KIDDUSH (Part 5) – Unity through Separation

“Although you may enjoy the rest and the tranquility of Shabbat, have in mind that you are not observing the day for your own pleasure; rather to honor the One who commanded you to do so.”

Sefat Emet (Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter)

Kiddush concludes: “For that day is the prelude to the holy convocations, a memorial of the Exodus from Egypt. For You chose us and You sanctified us from all the other nations. And you gave us Your holy Shabbat with love and favor as a heritage. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who sanctifies the Shabbat.”

Acknowledging that Hashem created the world when we recite Kiddush on Friday night would seem to be an obvious and perfect way of expressing our obligation to remember Shabbat and to guard it. Yet, Kiddush does not stop there. It continues, by connecting the Creation of the world to the Exodus from Egypt. The Exodus is the moment that we, the Jewish Nation, were released from servitude.

However, at first glance, the Exodus does not appear to be seamlessly connected to the Creation. After all, there are more than two thousand four hundred years separating the two events. So, why does Kiddush join the two together?

The answer to this question provides an essential and foundational lesson. By connecting the two concepts of Creation and Freedom, we are stating unequivocally that freedom from slavery alone is lacking. If we do not attach our physical freedom to a spiritual ideal, it is virtually of no consequence. Maximilian Harden was a completely assimilated German Jew who was the editor of *Die Zukunft*. He wrote in July 1922, "Freedom is an obsolete Jewish concept." While he may have been correct about freedom being a Jewish concept, he could not have been more wrong about it being obsolete. Here we are, just over one hundred years later, declaring our allegiance to freedom. Freedom from the mundane. To dedicate one day a week focusing on the only truly important dimension in our existence: the spiritual.

Maimonides so eloquently describes all physical goals as imaginary values. They are valueless because they do not enhance the soul.

To be continued...

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Separating Challah

In addition to the portion of produce that is to be gifted to the Kohen, we are commanded to take a part off of every batch of dough that we prepare in our homes.

Just as the threshing floor shows us the abundance with which Hashem has blessed the field, our dough represents the prosperity with which Hashem has blessed our homes. In both cases, the Torah instructs that an owner may not partake of his goods until he performs the act of separating a portion for the Kohen. In the case of produce, the separated portion is called *terumah*, while in the case of dough it is called *challah*. (This is the origin of the name of traditional loaves of bread served on Shabbat).

By separating this *terumah* or *challah*, the owner gives homage to Hashem in recognition of His blessing of one's field and home. The gift goes to the Kohen, who represents the Sanctuary of Torah. This awareness begins in the field and is renewed when he prepares the daily bread for himself and his family. While all the crops that ripen in the field are a blessing to all people, the bread baked in one's home symbolizes his individual blessing.

There is no minimum quantity stated for the portion separated. The obligation may be satisfied (according to the Torah) with even the tiniest piece of dough or a single kernel from the whole pile. (There is, however, a rabbinic minimum requirement.) On the other hand, there is a maximum limit for both. Both are termed *reishit*, meaning *the beginning of*, or *the first portion of*. This would not remain a true description unless a considerable amount remains. Hence, our Rabbis taught that if one declares his whole barn to be *terumah*, or the whole of his dough to be *challah*, his declaration is invalid and has no effect.

This teaches an important lesson: No one may consider the Kohen's relation to the Torah to be a substitute for his own. He should not view the Kohen's existence as worthy and his own existence as insignificant. Instead, he is to understand that blessing preserves his own existence – and that existence is dedicated to Hashem and His Torah.

- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 15:20

PEREK SHIRA: THE SONG OF EXISTENCE

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE WOLF

The Wolf says:

“For every matter of crime, for an ox, for a donkey, for a sheep, for a garment, for any lost object, about which he will say, “This is it” – to the judges will the matter of the two come. He who is incriminated by the judges will pay two-fold to his fellow.” (Shemot 22:8)

Wolves are the most notorious predators of livestock. They attack like a band of thieves, preferring the darkness of the night and employing tactics of trickery. Wolves have been known to lure the shepherds away from the flocks with part of the pack while the rest of the pack attacks the defenseless sheep. They possess aggressive and brazen natures, and sometimes attack even when they are not hungry.

Wolves sing of Hashem’s justice – upon themselves – when the shepherds strike back at them. Their song is the Torah law regarding a shepherd from whom livestock were stolen, that the thief must repay doubly.

Although outright theft may be unthinkable to us, the fruitlessness of crime is a lesson with innumerable applications. Whenever we abstain from all-too-common questionable gains, we turn the wolf’s wail into a Divine song.

**Sources: Targum Yonanasan to Shemos 22:8; Bereishis Rabbah 99:3; HaMeir; Daas Shalom; Malbim to Yechezkel 22:27; Kenaf Renanim*

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*