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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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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.

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.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Metzia 110-116

No Collateral Damage

“When you lend to someone else, you shall not enter his home to take his collateral. You shall stand outside, and the person to whom you gave the loan will bring the collateral to you outside.” (Devarim 24:10 & 11)

These verses serve as the basis for laws that govern taking a security for payment of a loan (and certain other debts) in the event the time for payment has arrived and the borrower refuses to pay. The *mishna* on our *daf* teaches this halacha explicitly: “One who lends his friend, he should take a security in Beit Din (Jewish religious legal court), and he should not enter the person’s house to take the security.”

The Sage Shmuel explains in the *gemara* that the prohibition against entering the borrower’s home to take the security is referring to the agent of the Beit Din, who was appointed and sent to collect from the borrower. Nevertheless, he may not enter the borrower’s domain. Rather, this agent of the court is permitted to grab it from the borrower when the borrower is in the marketplace, or some such public area outside the home. Accordingly, it seems from the *gemara* that the lender may not only not enter the borrower’s home to take a

security, but is also not allowed to take seize it in the open – rather, he must file a claim in Beit Din so that Beit Din will send their agent to collect it in public.

Not allowing a lender to collect his own security appears not to be in accordance with the principle of “*avid inish dina l’nafshei*” – a person may do what is lawful for himself – as is taught by Rav Nachman in Masechet Bava Kama 27b. A number of resolutions are offered by the Rishonim and Achronim. Here are two for starters.

The Torah prohibits the lender's seizing an item only if he is seizing it as collateral. However, if he is taking it as payment for the debt, it is permitted (Rabbeinu Tam). The Ketzot HaChoshen questions this explanation since taking an item for payment requires that the Beit Din evaluate its exact value, and barring this evaluation, the item may not be taken. An additional answer offered by Rabbeinu Tam is that a person may only “take the law into his own hands” if he is taking from another person an item that in fact belongs to him. The most obvious example would be that if a person sees a thief with his stolen item, he is permitted to repossess it from the thief. Regarding taking an object for security in the case of a loan, however, only an agent of Beit Din may take action, and, even then, only outside of the debtor’s home.

An interesting note: The word “coined” by Chazal in the *mishna* for a collateral security is different than the word that appears in the Torah. Our Sages use the word “*mashkon*” in the *mishna* and *gemara* for a collateral. It literally means “that which dwells”. I have heard that this “new word” is meant to teach us to view the collateral item as merely “dwelling” in the hands of the lender, despite him not being the true owner (yet).

The Torah word for collateral in Devarim 24:10 (and other places) is “*avot*”, spelled *ayin, veit, tet*. Rabbi Shimson Raphael Hirsch explains in his commentary on the Chumash Devarim 15:6 that the word *avot* is related to the word *eved* (slave), which denotes the intensely joined nature of the relationship between the lender, borrower, and the security item that represents the borrower’s “enslavement” to the lender. Rabbi Hirsch also points out that the word *avot* is also related to the Hebrew word for braided, such as braided rope that tightly joins two entities (although the Hebrew word for braided is spelled with a *taf* at the end instead of a *tet*). Collateral taken for payment serves as an indication of “who’s the boss”, and who is tied up to whom.

▪ *Bava Metzia 113a*

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COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 3)

UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

"My walk on the moon lasted three days. My walk with G-d will last forever."
Charles Duke – Lunar Module Pilot, Apollo 16

Kiddush Levanah begins with the first six verses of Tehillim 148: "Praise G-d! Praise Hashem from the heavens, praise Him in the heights. Praise Him, all His angels, praise Him all His legions. Praise Him sun and moon, praise Him all bright stars. Praise Him highest heavens, and the waters that are above the heavens. Let them praise the Name of Hashem, for He commanded and they were created. And He established them for ever and ever, He issued a decree that will not change." These verses of Tehillim 148 were chosen to begin Kiddush Levanah because they describe how the heavens – including the moon – praise Hashem.

The Rabbis explain that the source of all praises to Hashem are in the heavens. The praises continuously echo throughout the entire world, but only the Tzaddikim are capable of hearing them. Because only the Tzaddikim truly listen.

The Chazon Ish used to go for a walk along the same route every day. While he was walking, he would learn. One day, he was accosted by an older man, who did not have any idea of whom he was talking to, and accused the Chazon Ish of wasting time. He shouted at him to stop wandering around and to learn something. And if he didn't know how to learn, to say some Tehillim! The Chazon Ish didn't answer him and the man went on his way. The next day, exactly the same thing happened. This time, the Chazon Ish asked the man what he wanted him to do with his time. So, again, he told him to recite Tehillim. After that, the Chazon Ish changed his route in order to not upset the man any further.

One day, a member of the man's family became sick and they advised the man to go to get a blessing from the saintly Chazon Ish. The man set off to the famous address. On arriving and seeing that the man he had accosted was none other than the Chazon Ish himself, he fainted! When he came to, he immediately started begging for forgiveness. Over and over again he asked, until finally he fell silent. At that point, the Chazon Ish told him that he had nothing to ask forgiveness for. He said it was a splendid idea to say Tehillim and that he had incorporated it into his day. Great people have no problem listening and learning from others. They are able to hear what others do not hear.

The last of the verses recited ends with the words, "He issued a decree that will not change." Rashi explains that since the time of their creation, the sun and the moon have done exactly as Hashem commanded them to do. The sun brings light to the daytime and the moon illuminates the night. Neither one of them ever tried to encroach on the dominion of the other because it is not possible to dispute Hashem's decree. Being totally aware that it is Hashem Who defines their qualities, meant that it was ridiculous for them to harbor any feelings of jealousy. Recognizing that everything comes from Hashem means that there is nothing to argue about.

In describing the structure of the word "machloket – argument," Rabbi Yishayahu Horowitz, Shnei Luchot Habrit, points out that the first letter 'mem' has a tiny opening, which represents a still small and narrow

disagreement. The opening of the next letter 'chet' is wider, and it represents the idea that the rift is growing bigger. The 'lamed' is the tallest letter, towering above the other letters, and 'kuf' drops downwards. All these letters suggest that if the machloket is not immediately contained, it will take on a life of its own, growing bigger and larger, engulfing everyone in its wake. And then finally, the last letter 'taf,' standing securely on its own two feet, symbolizes the devastating durability of machloket.

Rabbi Horowitz said that the easiest way to defuse a machloket is right at the very beginning, before it grows out of hand, while it is still only a small opening in the 'mem.'

But, when two antagonists incorporate into their lives the reality that only Hashem is in charge, the acrimonious balloon of machloket deflates and becomes nothing of consequence.

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Message on a Pole

Before the Jews entered the Holy Land, they demanded of Moses to send a group of spies to it scout out that and uncover its weaknesses. In that unfortunate incident, the spies ended up returning to the Jewish People with a negative report about the Promised Land, and the disheartened nation ended up having to stay in the desert for forty years before they would once again have a chance to enter the Holy Land. When describing how the spies checked out the land, the Bible reports: "And they came until Nachal Eshkol, and they cut from there a branch [zemorah] and a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it upon the spit [mot] in twos" (Num. 13:23). This verse uses the word mot to denote a pole used for carrying things. There are several other words in Hebrew that refer to more or less the same concept, including neis, bad, toren, and shapud. In this essay, we will examine all of those possible synonyms by exploring their respective etymologies and trying to hone in on exactly what each term means.

Besides for its appearance in the story of the spies, a mot was also used for carrying the Tabernacle paraphernalia when travelling in the wilderness (Num. 4:10, 4:12). A mot is thus a "pole" used for carrying things, like an oversized cluster of grapes (like in the case of the spies) or the ritual objects of the Tabernacle. These three cases, plus Nah. 1:13, are the only instances of the word mot in the Bible. But, a feminine form of the word, motah (plural: motot) appears another twelve times. Those forms of the word most often appear in reference to the "bar of a yoke" used to control an animal or person (for examples, see Lev. 26:13, Isa. 58:6, and Yechezkel 30:18).

What is the shorash ("etymological root") of the word mot? For those lexicographers like Ibn Janach and Radak who believe that most Hebrew are rooted in trilateral roots, the answer is pretty clear: MEM-VAV-TET, and that is exactly what they write in their respective Sefer HaShorashim. However, the biliteralists who believe in two-letter roots are divided on this question. The Medieval biliteralist Menachem Ibn Saruk writes in Machberet Menachem that the root of mot is MEM-TET, which he explains also begets Hebrew words like tamut ("slipping / falling/ inclining"), mateh ("stick/staff"), matey ("tribe / family"), mitah ("bed") and the Aramaic word mata ("touching"). On the other, the Enlightenment-era biliteralist Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim traces mot to TET-

HEY, which we will explain below. What this means is that Menachem understood the middle VAV of the word mot to be extraneous to the core root, while Rabbi Pappenheim even understood the initial MEM of mot to be extraneous.

As Rabbi Pappenheim explains it, the core meaning of TET-HEY is the concept of “changing the current situation by inclining/moving in a different direction.” Hence, he sees the word natah (“inclining/turning”) as one of the main tributaries of this root. But since more a change in direction often entails moving downwards (especially because gravity is usually pulling in that direction), words like l'matah (“down / downward”) and matah (“falling/descending/slipping”) also derive from this root. He further connects the word mitah to this idea because one using a bed, one inclines oneself horizontally to lay down. Similarly, a mateh refers to an instrument that one uses to help one walk by leaning (i.e., inclining oneself) on it.

In light of this, it is no surprise that Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the word mot also derives from this root. In his work Cheshek Shlomo, he offers two explanations for how mot fits in, noting that from the simple contextual usage in the Bible, there is no way to decide which of these is more correct: Firstly, a mot refers to an especially thick wooden pole, which typically branches out from the bottom part of a tree (as opposed to the thinner branches at the top of tree). Because of this, mot relates to le'matah. Alternatively, he explains that mot may be related to natah, as it typically comes from a tree branch which is something that juts out to the sides of a tree, as though “turning” in a direction perpendicular to the trunk. In his work Yeriot Shlomo, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that mot is simply an extra strong mateh, so it derives more directly from that word.

**For more about these synonyms and an especially a discussion of the word neis and its various meanings, visit us online at: http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/ for the full version of this article.*

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance.” (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)

Tzitzis

Mitzvah #386 (Bamidbar 15:37-41)

HASHEM'S SEAL

A master places a seal upon his servants to show his ownership and to remind them of their responsibilities. So too, Hashem commands us to wear tzitzis to distinguish us from non-Jews and to remind us of the mitzvos (see Menachos 43b).

PROTECTION AGAINST HERESY AND IMMORALITY

The Torah tells us that tzitzis are especially helpful in reminding a person to avoid “straying after his heart and eyes,” which the Sages interpret as a reference to heretical thoughts and immoral sights (Berachos 12b). These sins require special protection because they are attractive and at the same time spiritually destructive. When a person's eye sees something desirable but prohibited, it is difficult for him to restrain himself by merely recalling the prohibition and the destructive results of a transgression. Hashem therefore countered sinful visual attraction with a visual reminder in the form of tzitzis (Ohr Hachaim). We may suggest further that when a

person wears a garment over his heart and body that is tied with knots that symbolize subjugation to Hashem, he is reminded that his heart and body are not free to do as they please. Other than functioning as a reminder, the very wearing of *tzitzis* adds holiness to a person (*Sifri*), thereby elevating him above lowly temptations.

EIGHT STRINGS AND FIVE KNOTS

The Torah indicates that by wearing *tzitzis* will be reminded to observe all the mitzvos. We remind ourselves of all the mitzvos through the *tzitzis* by tying five knots on each set of eight strings. For, “*tzitzis*” has the numerical value 600, which together with 5 and 8 adds up to 613 (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 8:21 and *Gur Aryeh*). In addition, by tying five knots upon eight strings on each corner, we remind ourselves to follow the five books of the Torah when using eight parts of the body: ears, eyes, mouth, nose, hands, feet, reproductive organ, and heart (*Baal HaTurim*). We also spin rows of strings between the knots in a way that alludes to Hashem. For example, many tie a total of 39 rows, which is the numerical value of “Hashem is one.” There are 32 strings on all corners combined, which reminds us not to stray after our hearts, for the heart (*lev*) has a numerical value of 32 (*Mekor Chaim*).

The colors of the strings are white and blue, which are colors that remind us of Hashem. White is the color of the Divine Attribute of Kindness, and blue is the color of Divine the Attribute of Mercy and of the sapphire Throne of Glory (*Sotah* 17a and *Ohr HaChaim*).

FOUR CORNERS

Just as a slave wears a seal on which is stamped his master’s name, *tzitzis* strings are attached to four corners, corresponding to the four letters of Hashem’s name (see *Rosh David*, *Ki Seitzei*). The four corners indicate that our Master’s kingship extends to the “four corners” of the world (*Ohr HaChaim*). The four corners (*kenafos*) also allude to the time of the Exodus, when Hashem claimed us as his slaves. Then, He lifted us on eagle's wings (*kenafos*) and fulfilled four expressions of redemption: “I will take them out; I will save them; I will redeem them; I will take them to be My nation” (*Rashi*). Another reason why the Torah commands us to place *tzitzis* on each corner is that they are thereby noticed whichever way a person turns (*Baal HaTurim*).

LIFELINE

The Sages compare the *tzitzis* strings to a lifeline. It is as if someone falls off a ship into the raging ocean, and the captain throws him a rope and tells him to hold on for his life. So too, keeping spiritually alive in this temptation-filled world is like staying afloat in a raging ocean. Hashem, the captain of the ship, gave us *tzitzis* as a reminder to fulfill the mitzvos, and thereby to hold tightly onto Him, the source of life (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 17:6 and *Radal*).