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PARSHAT SHLACH פרשת שלח

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by Marc Daniel Selig.

DVAR TORAH MOSHE RABBEINU'S TZITZIT

The Midrash makes a comment about the opening line of the Torah's command about tzitzit that left commentators puzzled.

The Torah begins: "Hashem said to Moshe, saying, 'Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them that they should make tzitzit for the fringes of their garments'" (Bamidbar 15:37-38). The Midrash comments (Sifrei Zuta on Bamidbar 15:35): "Hashem spoke to Moshe' – This includes "yechidim."

How should we translate "yechidim"? The first translation that comes to mind is "individuals." But that would raise the obvious question: Why does the Midrash need to tell us this? Why would anyone think that tzitzit is a communal mitzvah, requiring a special derivation to teach us that individuals are obligated? The author of the Zayit Raanan commentary (quoted in Harav Dr. Yehuda Cooperman זצ"ל's footnotes on the Meshech Chochmah), suggests that this Midrash counters a mistaken approach – we might have thought that the obligation of tzitzit only applies when praying with a community. But the author himself finds this difficult.

Harav Meir Simchah of Dvinsk, זצ"ל (1843–1926), in his Meshech Chochmah commentary on the Chumash, translates "yechidim" as "special individuals." This usage of "yechidim" appears in the context of fasting to pray for rain during a drought (Taanit 10a). If no rain fell by the seventeenth of Cheshvan, "yechidim" begin to fast. "Yechidim" is here defined as talmidei chachamim – Torah scholars.

Had this Midrash not taught us otherwise, we would have mistakenly thought, says the author of the Meshech Chochmah, that this mitzvah does not apply to Torah scholars. Because the reason given for the mitzvah of tzitzit is to avoid straying after our eyes and hearts (Bamidbar 15:39), those on a very high spiritual and moral level – we might have mistakenly thought – are not obligated in tzitzit. The Torah therefore opens the section with, "Hashem said to Moshe" – even Moshe, the greatest talmid chacham in history, must wear tzitzit. (The Meshech Chochmah does not develop what tzitzit means for the "yechidim" – that they also need this safeguard for their subtle struggles, or that the mitzva has other lessons for them, see his comments on 15:40.)

The verse "Hashem said to Moshe," in general, indicates a personal command for Moshe to act. This expression appears when the princes donated the wagons to the Mishkan and Moshe was instructed to accept their gift (Bamidbar 7:5); when the daughters of Tzelafchad were to be assured of an inheritance (Bamidbar 27:7); and when the command to transgress Shabbat to save a life appears, and the Torah indicates that this should be done by those of the greatest stature present (Shemot 31:12 and Yoma 84a).

Our greatest leaders and sages are to set a clear example and take the lead in mitzvot one might theoretically have relegated to those of lower status.

SOURCE GUIDE: SPEAKING WITHOUT SEEING

The ten spies' slander of the Land of Israel is a classic example of lashon hara, negative speech. Therefore, much of our sources' discussion about lashon hara appears in conjunction with the sin of the spies. This source guide is based on an allusion to the spies in the book of Eichah, a comment in the Gemara, and the Maharal's discussion of that aggadic passage.

A. First פ Then ע

Our starting point is the second chapter of the book of Eichah. Four out of the five chapters of Eichah follow, for the most part, the order of the Aleph Bet. The first sentence of the first chapter begins with an א, the second sentence with a ב, and, with no exceptions, this continues through to the twenty-second verse that begins with a ת. But the second chapter has an exception; the verse beginning with a פ appears before the verse beginning with an ע (in subsequent chapters the פ also comes first – see the Maharsha's comments on Sanhedrin 104b). Here is the progression of verses so the shift in order is evident:

<p>1. Eichah 2:14-18 (14) Your prophets (begins with נ) ... (15) They clapped their hands at you (begins with ס) ... (16) All your enemies have opened their mouths wide against you; they hissed and gnashed their teeth, and said, "We have swallowed her up! This is the day we longed for; we have found it; we have seen it." (begins with פ) (17) Hashem did (begins with ע) ... (18) Their heart cried out (begins with צ) ...</p>	<p>איכה ב:יד-יח (יד) נְבִיאֶיךָ ... (טו) סִפְּקוּ עֲלֵיךָ כַּפַּיִם ... (טז) פָּצוּ עֲלֵיךָ פִּיהֶם כָּל אוֹיְבֶיךָ שָׂרְקוּ וַיִּחַרְקוּ שֵׁן אָמְרוּ בְלִעְנֵנו אַף זֶה הַיּוֹם שִׁקְרֵינָהוּ מִצְאָנוּ רְאִינוּ. (יז) עָשָׂה ה' ... (יח) צָעַק לָבָם ...</p>
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B. Speaking Without Seeing

Why are the פ and ע verses switched? Rabbi Yochanan explains why:

<p>2. Sanhedrin 104b "They opened their mouths wide" – Rava quoted Rabbi Yochanan, who said: Why does the פ verse precede that of the ע verse? It is because of the spies, who said with their mouths what they did not see with their eyes.</p>	<p>סנהדרין קד: "פצו עליך פיהם" – אמר רבא אמר רבי יוחנן: בשביל מה הקדים פ"א לעי"ן? בשביל מרגלים שאמרו בפיהם מה שלא ראו בעיניהם.</p>
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The letter פ can be spelled פה, the Hebrew word for mouth. The letter ע is spelled עין, the Hebrew word for eye. The simple explanation of Rabbi Yochanan's statement is that the spies lied – they spoke about things they did not see. The Tanach alludes to this by placing the פ verse before the ע verse. This refers to the spies' speaking with their mouths without having previously seen with their eyes. Their mouths spoke even about things they had not seen. Though much of what they spoke about they did see – the fruit of the Land, the giants, the cities – the spies combined truth with lies. They not only spoke about what they saw, but also about what they did not see. However the following verse is an example of them speaking about what they certainly did not see, because it is about the future:

<p>5. Bamidbar 15:31 The men who went up with him (Kalev) said, "We will not be able to go up against the nation for it is stronger than us."</p>	<p>במדבר יג:לא וְהֶאֱנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר עָלוּ עִמּוֹ אָמְרוּ לֹא נוּכָל לָעֲלוֹת אֶל הָעָם כִּי חֲזָק הוּא מִמֶּנּוּ.</p>
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The allusion to the spies in Eichah, according to this interpretation, highlights their falsehood.

C. Speaking Before Seeing

Perhaps another explanation of Rabbi Yochanan's statement flows out of Rashi's comment:

<p>6. Rashi on Sanhedrin 104b "Because of the spies" – who preceded the words of their mouths before what they saw with their eyes.</p>	<p>רש"י על סנהדרין קד: "מפני מרגלים" - שהקדימו מאמר פיהם עד שלא ראו בעין.</p>
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Perhaps, according to Rashi, the spies first decided they would speak negatively – their mouths came first – and then they looked for material to interpret negatively – their eyes came later, seeking out observations to fuel their slander.

It is clear from Rashi's comments on the Chumash that the plot of the spies to slander the Land of Israel began during their trip, not only when they returned. For instance, Rashi on Bamidbar 13:23 points out that Yehoshua and Kalev did not take samples of the fruit of the Land of Israel. They knew that the other spies only intended through the fruit to defame the Land. According to this interpretation, the spies were not objective. They were molding even their accurate observations to support their plot of slandering the Land.

D. Cutting Off

Why exactly did the sin of the spies lead to Israel eventually going into exile (not only delaying their original entry into the Land), as the allusion in Eichah indicates? The Maharal, in his Chiddushei Aggadot commentary on Sanhedrin, offers two explanations:

<p>6. Maharal Chidushei Aggadot on Sanhedrin 104b "They opened up their mouths wide ..." – This means to say that the spies slandered the Land through falsehood. It is written. "Hashem will cut off all smooth lipped ones, tongues who speak in a lofty way" (Tehillim 12:4). Therefore, this sin, slandering the Land, caused them to be cut off from the Land to go into exile ... The reason is that this is the problem of the [evil] tongue, it causes separation and division between a man and his friend. Therefore the Torah said that [the metzora, who was punished for slander,] should sit by himself outside the camp. Because he caused a separation and division between a man and his wife, and between a man and his friend; he too should sit alone. He is therefore also cut off and separated from his roots and must go into exile. This is also referred to as "cutting off" – being cut off from the place within which he is planted.</p>	<p>מהר"ל חידושי אגדות על סנהדרין קד : "פצו עליהם פיהם ... – ור"ל כי המרגלים שהוציאו דבה על הארץ בשקר, וכתוב "יכרת ה' כל שפתי חלקות לשון מדברת גדולות" (תהלים י"ב:ד). ולכך החטא הזה שהוציאו דבה על הארץ היתה גורמת להיות נכרתים מן הארץ ללכת בגולה ... והטעם כי זהו ענין הלשון, שהוא עושה פירוד והבדל בין איש לחבירו. ולכך אמרה תורה בדרך ישוב מחוץ למחנה, הוא עשה פירוד והבדלה בין איש לאשתו ובין אדם לחבירו, ולפיכך בדרך ישוב ג"כ. ולכך ג"כ הוא נכרת ונבדל משרשו והולך בגלות, שזה ג"כ נקרא כריתה שהוא נכרת ממקום שהוא נטוע.</p>
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Slander causes separation; he therefore is separated. The spies and the nation who slandered were therefore cut off from their roots and went into exile. The Maharal adds a second level of explanation:

<p>7. Maharal Chidushei Aggadot on Sanhedrin 104b When they slandered the Land that was their dwelling place and the place they were planted, and when they needlessly cried, hoping they would not enter the Land because of the evil speech of the spies – crying for generations was established for them. For when they sinned through evil speech about the Land, it is impossible for that not to cause them to be cut off from the Land. All evil speech causes cutting off. How could they stay planted in the Land that they slandered? ...</p>	<p>מהר"ל חידושי אגדות על סנהדרין קד : ... כאשר הוציאו דבה על הארץ במקום אשר הוא ישיבתם ונטיעתם, והיו בוכים בכיה של חנם שלא לכנוס לארץ בשביל לשון הרע של מרגלים, נקבע להם בכיה לדורות. כי אי אפשר שלא יהיה גורם דבר זה להם כריתה מן הארץ, כאשר היו חוטאים בלשון הרע על הארץ, שכל לשון הרע גורם כריתה ואיך יהיו נטועים בארץ אמרו עליו לשון הרע ...</p>
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1. The lashon hara of the spies caused Israel to be cut off from their roots and exiled. 2. Certainly, when they slandered the very place they were connected to, the Land of Israel, they were naturally cut off from it. The Maharal also offers an explanation of what "the mouth preceding the eye" means:

7. Maharal Chidushei Aggadot on Sanhedrin 104b

... The wise man will understand why the פ precedes the ע. For the eye represents reality; for that is what one sees. And the mouth represents speech, which is not the reality; the eye is. Speech, though, should correspond to reality. But the spies preceded the פ to the ע, the mouth to the eye. They were not drawn after truth, which is reality. They were instead drawn after falsehood. And all falsehood is lacking and non-existent. This caused them to also lack the Land and be exiled from it. All of this happened because they preceded the mouth to the eye, and, with regards to the Land, weren't drawn after its true reality. They were instead drawn after falsehood, non-existence and lack. Therefore the Land was lacking from them. Understand this well ...

מהר"ל חידושי אגדות על סנהדרין קד:
... והאיש המשכיל יבין בענין [קדימת]
קריא' פ"ה לעין, כי העין הוא המציאות
שכך נראה ונמצא והפה הוא הדבור ואינו
המציאות רק העין הוא המציאות, וראוי
שיהיו הדבור כמו שהוא נמצא במציאות,
אבל המרגלים הקדימו הפה לעין ולא היו
נמשכין אחר האמת שהוא המציאות, והיו
נמשכין אחר השקר וכל שקר הוא נעדר
ובלתי נמצא. ודבר זה היה גורם שיהיה נעדר
להם הארץ ג"כ וגלו ממנו, וכל זה הגיע
להם כאשר הקדימו הפה לעין ולא היו
נמשכין בענין הארץ אל המציאות האמיתית,
רק הם נמשכין אחר השקר שהוא בלתי
נמצא והוא נעדר ולכך נעדר להם ג"כ הארץ
והבן זה מאוד ...

The Maharal interprets Rabbi Yochanan's "mouth" and "eye" as speech and reality. The פ preceding the ע refers to speech (the פה, the mouth) that does not reflect reality (the עין, the eye). Falsehood is, by definition, non-existent and lacking and therefore led to lacking the Land of Israel. Truthful speech reflects reality.

SARAH'S YUD BY RABBI YITZCHAK LERNER

This week's parshah tells us Moshe Rabbeinu changed Yehoshua's name from יהושע to יהושע, adding a Yud. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 2:6) tells us that when G-d changed Sarah's name from שרי to שרה, the Yud came to complain to G-d and said, "It's not fair that I'm being taken out of the Torah." G-d reassured the Yud by telling him not to worry – "You will be placed in the proper place. That will be in Yehoshua's name."

My rosh yeshivah asked the following question: Even though Yehoshua is one of our greatest leaders, he is still not equivalent to Sarah Imenu, the mother of the Jewish People. What did Yehoshua do to deserve the Yud from Sarah's name?

There is a famous Midrash that tells us that when Yehoshua was in the tent studying Torah, not only did he not move from the tent, but he was the first in and the last out of the tent. And the Midrash tells us that Yehoshua also arranged all of the benches, made sure there was fire, made sure there was food for all of the Jewish People. Not only was Yehoshua a great leader, but Yehoshua also had maternal instincts that not every leader has.

Perhaps Yehoshua deserved that Yud because he had Sarah's maternal instincts. It is on this basis that he was ordained by Moshe Rabbeinu and he merited to take the Jewish People from the desert into the Land of Israel.

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