

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
**WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES**

**Parshas Shelach**

June 17, 2005

**In Honor of the Birth of a Grandson to Howard and Sorah Birnbaum,  
Chazan Ralph and Avrille Nussbaum**

**And to the  
The Proud Parents**

**Brett and Naomi Nussbaum**

**Mazel Tov!**

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

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New York  
June 17, 2005

B"H

## Parshas Shelach

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

### 1. The Unification of Tzaddikim

The Torah tells us that the burden of adjudicating all of the issues of the Jewish people became too much for Moshe handle on his own. In order to alleviate this burden G'd said to Moshe, **"Gather to Me seventy men from the elders of Israel..."** The Midrash explains, "G'd builds in Heaven His palace with many levels but its foundation is a single unified bundle on earth. This is analogous to a king whose palace was built on a platform of boats that were tightly lashed together. As long as the boats are tightly bound, the palace above is secure. When is G'd's Throne in heaven secure - when the Jewish people are bound together as one bundle in unity. It is because of this that G'd said to Moshe 'Gather to Me seventy men...' When tzaddikim are gathered together, it is good for them and good for the world. However the assembly of the wicked is a detriment and pitfall for them and the world." Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk z'tl explains regarding a similar statement in a Mishna in Tractate Sanhedrin, that when tzaddikim are unified – each one encourages and strengthens the other. Therefore, it is good for them and the world. The same thing is true regarding the wicked. Their unification only reinforces and strengths their evil. Thus, it is a pitfall for them and a detriment to the world.

It is true that all of the Jewish people are not classified as "tzaddikim (righteous)"; however if the tzaddikim are unified as one, they will positively influence all of the Jewish people and create unity among them. If there is unity among the Torah sages, which is the center of existence, then G'd will give the Jewish people a sense of clarity that will bring about greater levels of spirituality for them. Even the Jew who is distant from Torah will experience some degree of clarity because of the unity of the Jewish people.

How can G'd, of infinite dimension have any relevance to an existence that is finite? It is when there is a commonality between the world and Him that there is a basis for a relationship. G'd's primary characteristic is that He is One. When the Jewish people reflect that unity, they cause G'd to draw closer to them. Consequently, the world is a beneficiary of G'd's Presence/Influence. The proximity of G'd to existence brings blessing. It is when G'd is close to existence that the influences of Good become intensified – thus dominating all that is negative.

It is the objective of the Jewish people to be unified in every respect so that G'd will have a proper relationship with them. This unification can only come about through Torah study and mitzvos. These will cause the Jew to value and love his fellow.

### 1. Dedication, the Determining Factor

At the beginning of the Portion of Shelach, the Midrash discusses the concept of "shaliach mitzvah – an agent who performs a mitzvah." The Midrash cites the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos, "One is not permitted to embark on a sea voyage three days before Shabbos if the journey is not mitzvah related. However if he is going to perform a mitzvah he is permitted to embark on his voyage even immediately before Shabbos. This is because he is an agent to perform a mitzvah (shaliach mitzvah). In this context, a shaliach mitzvah supersedes the Shabbos. We find regarding the mitzvah of Sukkah that one is exempt from it if he is a shaliach mitzvah because there is no one more beloved to G'd than one who is an agent and performs His Will. The agent accepts upon himself the responsibility of carrying out the agency and is willing to sacrifice himself for its sake." The shaliach mitzvah is beloved to G'd because he is cognizant of his awesome

responsibility to ensure the mitzvah is carried out under any circumstance.

The Midrash continues, “There were no individuals dedicated to this degree as Yehoshua bin Nun, Pinchas, and Calev...We find that Talmidei Chachamim (Torah sages) are referred to as “angels” because they are dedicated to carrying out the Will of G’d just like the angels. The angel was created only to carry out the Will of G’d and thus he is unwavering in his function. Similarly, the Torah sage is singularly focused on fulfilling his agency - to disseminate Torah and perform mitzvos.”

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that Reb Chiya understood and appreciated his awesome responsibility. He said, “Because of my contribution to Torah, it was not forgotten from the Jewish people.” He meticulously dedicated himself to prepare and teach young children Torah. His level of involvement and selfless dedication in every aspect of this mitzvah went beyond any standard. He instilled in his young students that it was their responsibility to disseminate the Torah that they had been taught – thus perpetuating and guaranteeing its existence. When Reb Chiya charged his students with this great responsibility, he impressed upon them that they must accept their agency with the utmost dedication. It is only through selfless dedication does the performance of the mitzvah bear everlasting fruit.

The shaliach mitzvah is beloved to G’d because he is willing to sacrifice himself to do the Will of G’d. The performance of the mitzvah is only the means through which the agent demonstrates his dedication. The Gemara tells us in Tractate Sanhedrin, “G’d wants the heart.” The determining factor, which causes a mitzvah to be considered something of quality, is one’s dedication to G’d. The performance of a mitzvah must be experienced as a privilege and not as a burden.

In order to be worthy of G’d’s Mercy, one must have a relationship with Him. This relationship can only be developed and established by one’s dedication to the performance of His mitzvos. The more one is dedicated to His service, the more he will be a greater beneficiary of His Mercy. As it states in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers), “Make your Torah study primary and your work secondary.” This must be the priority of every Jew.

## ***2. The Juxtaposition of the Sin of the Spies to the Mitzvah of Challah***

The Jewish people are G’d’s chosen people and are considered His most precious possession. Thus, the one has the responsibility to be continuously cognizant of his actions and behavior brings about a kiddush Hashem (sanctification of G’d’s Name) and prevent chilul Hashem (desecration of G’d’s Name).

The Torah tells us in the Portion of Beha’aloscha that Yisro, the Sheik of Midian, left his position of glory and his community in order to join the Jewish people in the desert after they had left Egypt and experienced the splitting of the sea. After spending a substantial amount of time with the Jewish people, he decided to return to his homeland, Midian. Moshe pleaded with him not to leave the Jewish people, **“Please do not forsake us, inasmuch as you know our encampments in the Wilderness, and you have been as eyes for us.”** Moshe the greatest prophet who ever lived had a level of clarity that was one of a kind. Why did he plead with Yisro to remain with the Jewish people? In addition, the Jewish people were under the direct providence of G’d.

Sforno explains that the context in which the Jewish people lived in the desert was an ongoing miraculous existence. G’d provided them with all of their needs. Their only focus was their spirituality. G’d dwelled in their midst on a most obvious level. If Yisro and his family were to leave the Jewish people, the nations of the world would say, “If in fact the Jewish people were truly beneficiaries of the ultimate blessings of G’d, then why did Yisro chose to leave their midst?” This misunderstanding would have been considered a chilul Hashem (desecration of G’d’s Name). Moshe did not want this decision to be misperceived by the nations of the world. He thus pleaded with Yisro that he and his family not return to their homeland. Although Yisro did ultimately return, his family remained.

After the sin of the spies, the Torah tells us that the Jews received the mitzvah of challah (tithing of the dough). Sforno asks, “Why is the mitzvah of challah juxtaposed to the sin of the spies?” He explains that because of the sin of the spies, (which was the ultimate chilul Hashem), the Jewish people were no longer worthy of receiving blessing and needed the mitzvah of challah to be reinstated to that level. He cites a verse from Yechezkel that states, “The first of your dough you shall give to the Kohen – to place blessing in your home.”

It is interesting to note that Chazal tell us that a woman has mitzvos that are personal to her. For example, kindling the Shabbos and Yom Tov lights, tithing the

dough (taking challah), and nidah (laws of menstruation). Although the man is no less obligated than the woman, in a family setting the woman should be the one to kindle the lights. The Midrash explains that the reason for this is that “she (Eve/the wife of Adam) extinguished the light of the world. She must rekindle that light.” Chava had compelled her husband Adam to eat of the Tree of Knowledge. Adam being the handiwork of G'd – the nearly perfect creation – radiated holiness on a very special level. As a result of eating from the Tree he was spiritually diminished and no longer radiated as he had before the sin. The diminishment of Adam's spirituality is the equivalent of extinguishing the light of existence. When the woman kindles the Shabbos/Yom Tov lights, she is reinstating that light. Prior to eating of the Tree, Adam was considered the “most special being of existence- chalaso shel olam.” However, after eating the fruit of the Tree he became contaminated. The woman's obligation is to reinstate a semblance of what she had caused to be tainted. Thus, challah is considered her personal mitzvah.

The sin of the spies was a chilul Hashem, which is an extreme level of spiritual contamination. The Gemara in Tractate Yoma tells us that teshuvah alone cannot atone for the desecration of G'd's Name. Death is the only thing that can atone for the desecration of G'd's Name. The individual is only fully atoned with death. This is why the Jewish males between the ages of 20 and 60 needed to die over a 40-year period to atone for the sin of the spies. In order for the Jewish people to be reinstated to a level of purity to be worthy of blessing, they needed to be given the mitzvah of challah –as the woman was given this mitzvah to reinstate the purity of the world after the contamination of Adam.

### ***3. The Far Reaching Consequence of Moshe's Question***

The Midrash cites the words of King Solomon in Mishlei (Proverbs), “'Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, is the lazy one to the one who sent him.' What is this analogous to? It is similar to a king who had a vineyard – when he sees that that the vintage of the harvest is of good quality he says to his sharecroppers, 'Bring in the wine into my palace/house.' However when he sees that the wine has soured into vinegar he says to them, 'You take the vinegar to your houses – do not bring it to me.' Similarly, when G'd had seen the elders of the Jewish people acting in a proper manner, He said, '**Gather to Me seventy men (elders)...**' However, when He saw that ultimately the spies (meraglim) were going to fail/sin, G'd

said to Moshe, “**Send for yourself men...**” Regarding the elders, who were tzaddikim (righteous/devout) who acted in accordance with G'd's Will, G'd wanted that they should be associated with Him. However regarding the spies who were going to sin, He did not want any association with them, rather He said to Moshe “Send for yourself.”

The Midrash seemingly implies that Moshe had some degree of culpability regarding the spies. This is the reason G'd said to him to take the spies for himself. If he had no culpability the Torah would have said, “Send these spies...” The Torah tells us that at the time of the sin of the golden calf (when Moshe was in heaven), G'd said to Moshe, “**Go down, your people have become corrupted...**” The Midrash points out that G'd identified the people as “Moshe's people” indicating that he had some degree of culpability for their actions. Moshe responded saying, “Why are they my people and not Yours?” G'd explained to Moshe that the people that He was referring to were the rabble (eirev rav) who Moshe had taken out of Egypt without consulting with Him. The rabble instigated and initiated the golden calf. Thus, there is a degree of culpability attributable to Moshe for not consulting with G'd. However, regarding the sin of the spies, what relevance to did Moshe have to their decision to sin, that G'd should say, “Send for yourself” ?

The Torah tells us that after Moshe had presented himself as the Redeemer of Israel, the Jews staged a work stoppage. Pharaoh reacted to this by withdrawing the straw subsidy that was given to the Jewish people while maintaining the same quotas of bricks. The Jewish people came to Moshe and complained that their lives had become more difficult since he had come. Moshe went to G'd and said, “**My Lord, why have You done evil to this people, why have You sent me?**” G'd responded, “**Now you will see (the redemption).**” Chazal explain that “Now” implies that Moshe will merit seeing the present redemption from Egypt but will not merit to bring the Jewish people into the Land of Israel. Because he questioned G'd, he did not merit entering the Land. He was to pass away prior to the Jewish people entering Israel.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains the verse, “Send for yourself men...” to mean that it was in Moshe's best interest to send the spies into the Land of Israel. By doing so, the Jewish people would be delayed in the desert an additional 39 years before entering the Land, thus extending Moshe's life for 39 years. It was also in the interest of the Jewish people to be exposed to Moshe for

an additional 39 years. The issue of Moshe passing away prior to the Jewish people's entering the Land would not have come about had he not questioned G'd in Egypt. He would have entered together with them.

Indirectly, the sin of the spies was in essence a consequence of Moshe's questioning G'd. Because G'd wanted Moshe to live an additional 39 years, He created a setting of choice so that the Jews should be delayed in the desert for 39 years (i.e. the spies). With this understanding we can appreciate the Midrash, which states that the elders of Israel, who were tzaddikim and devout, identify with G'd – "Gather to Me..." However, the spies, who were only given the setting to choose because of the failing of Moshe in Egypt, they identify with him - "Send for yourself..."

#### ***4. Man's Ability to Evaluate Value***

The Yalkut states, "Reb Yochanan entered the study hall and lectured. He cited a verse from Isaiah, 'They will seek Me out every day and they will seek out My way.' Reb Yochanan asked, 'Does the prophet mean to say that they will only seek out G'd during the day time period and not at night time?' Rather the prophet is saying that if one studies Torah for only one day, G'd values it as if he had studied the Torah for an entire year. The same is also true regarding tragedy. The spies scouted the Land for 40 days. G'd said, 'For every day that you spied out the Land (with your evil intent), the Jewish people will remain an additional year in the desert (corresponding to the 40 days).' If one transgresses for one day, G'd values it as if he sinned the entire year."

Rambam writes in Hilchos Teshuvah (Laws of Repentance) based on the Gemara in Tractate Yomah that one is classified as "tzaddik (righteous)" if the majority of his accomplishments are meritorious, although the minority is negative. However, if the majority is negative, then he is classified as "rasha (evil)". Rambam explains, "How is this evaluation done? This evaluation is not based on a quantitative scale, but rather, it is a qualitative evaluation determined by inherent value of the good in and action or the evil of that action. There is a situation where one merit is the equivalent of many transgressions. (Thus, the single good deed outweighs many evil deeds.) Conversely, one could commit a single transgression that overwhelms and overshadows many good deeds. This evaluation can only be made by G'd Himself who is All-Knowing. He knows how to evaluate merit and

transgression." Man has no relevance to being able to make such an evaluation.

The study of Torah, even for one day, has infinite value. The only one who could understand, evaluate, and appreciate the value of that one day of Torah study is G'd Himself. The Prophet Isaiah communicates to us this fact that G'd values that one day of Torah study to be the equivalent of an entire year. Similarly the true gravity and far-reaching ramifications of a sin is only understood by G'd. Thus, one day of transgression is the equivalent of sinning for an entire year. This is communicated to us through G'd's punishment of the Jewish people for the actions of the spies. For every day of their transgression, the Jewish people spent one year in the desert.

The Torah tells us that because Avraham, our Patriarch, had asked G'd an inappropriate question – "How will I know (that my descendants will be worthy of inheriting the Land)?" G'd told him, "Your children shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs for 400 years..." The fact is the Jewish people were only in Egypt for 210 years. Chazal explain that the calculation of 400 years begins with the birth of Yitzchak. This is because Avraham was a stranger in the land in which he dwelled. Thus the counting should begin with this event.

Maharal of Prague asks that if exile is something that is negative, ominous, and painful, how are we able to calculate many of the years of Avraham's life as being part of the exile. In the latter part of his life, Avraham had gained wealth, renown, and children. Yitzchak also gained great wealth and merited to have children. Yaakov achieved great financial success. In addition the last 17 years of his life was lived in total tranquility with his family in Egypt. He was cared for by his son Yosef who was the Viceroy. Seemingly these situations do not appear to be that severe and negative to be classified as "exile" – "a stranger in a land that is not yours." Maharal of Prague explains that just as the Attribute of Justice is exacting when meting out punishment, it is also exacting in a positive vein. Although it appears that Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov were not experiencing the pain of exile; nevertheless, at their level of spirituality it is considered "exile" because their spirituality was not being accommodated to its level. Since they were denied the setting that was necessary for them to achieve the ultimate, the Attribute of Justice has been satisfied with implementing punishment.

The Gemara tells us if one reaches into his pocket with the intent of taking one particular coin and mistakenly

takes another – this is considered suffering. Is this something that we can truly comprehend as atonement/punishment? It is because the Attribute of Justice is satisfied with this level of inconvenience that it is considered sufficient suffering. We do not even have an inkling to understand the basis of evaluating reward or punishment in order to understand the innate graveness of an action or its innate goodness. It is only G'd Himself Who is able to make this evaluation.

One should not allow his own perception of value to determine whether he should do a mitzvah or not. Even a moment of Torah study has infinite value, which can not be comprehended. Similarly, even the most minute transgression, although it may seem innocuous, bring about untold spiritual devastation. One must see value through the eyes of G'd, which is the Torah and our prophets.