



Parashat Shlach



English version

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## THE MITZVAH TO BE YOURSELF

At least twice a day, we recite the words **וְאַתָּה תִּרְאֶה תְּהִלָּתָךְ וְאַתָּה תִּשְׁאַל אֲנֹתָרֵיךְ אֲשֶׁר-אָתָּת מִן-זֶה יְמִינֶךָ**. *And you shall not wander after your hearts and after your eyes, that you are straying after them.*

The Netziv brings to our attention a deeper meaning of this Passuk. Why does the Passuk use the word **תְּהִלָּתָךְ**, which comes from the root word spying, looking for something new, or wandering? It would be more appropriate to say, instead, **וְלֹא תֵלֶךְ אַחֲרֵי לְבָכֶם** *And don't go after your hearts...?!?*

Our Rabbis wanted to bury King Solomon's Kohelet, for it seemed to contradict the Torah, until they reconciled each apparently conflicting verse. (Vayikra Rabah 28a). Rabbi Yishmael asks if there may be a contradiction to these words of Shema, "not to wander after your heart", in the words of Kohelet, **שְׁמַח בְּחוּר בַּיּוֹנָקָר לְבָבְךָ וְהַלְּקָה בְּרוּכָה** *Rejoice lad, in your youth, and go in the way of your heart* (Kohelet 11). But Rabbi Yishmael reconciled the difference by focusing on the precision of the words. **Go** after your heart, but don't, or **wander** after your heart.

What is the difference between going after your heart or wandering after your heart? "Going after your heart" would mean following what you connect to, looking inward. **תְּהִלָּתָךְ**, wandering after your heart, would mean looking outward, at what everyone else is doing. **רַבִּי אָמַר אִיזְהוּ דָּرְךָ יְשָׁרָה שִׁבְורָה** *The most beautiful you is when you are following what you really connect to, something internal, or* **מִן הָאָדָם** *(Harchev Davar/ Netziv).* The Torah is telling us, in the words, **לَا תְּהִלָּה**, to be yourself. Be

original. Life is limited. Don't waste time trying to be someone else.

The Netziv expounds on why this concept of being yourself is mentioned next to the laws of Tzitzit strings. Tzitzit strings are the reminder to the 613 mitzvot, and each person has a mitzvah that he connects to. The Talmud brings a list of Rabbis, where each Rabbi mentioned that his Olam Haba would come from a specific Mitzvah that he connected to and took very seriously. Tzitzit, Shabbat, etc. (Shabbat 118b) The Ritva writes that each Talmid Chacham should choose one Mitzvah to observe with extra-special care. And, even one Mitzvah that you do whole heartedly can be your winning ticket to Olam Haba (Sefer Charedim Perek Chivat EY; Rambam end of Mishnayot Makkot).

In learning, as well, connecting is extremely important. Rav said, **אֵין אָדָם לֹומֶד תּוֹרָה אֶלָּא מִמֶּקוּם שְׁלִיבוֹ חַפְץ** *A person learns only what his heart desires, as we see in the Passuk.* (Avodah Zarah 19a) One of the greatest causes for people to leave learning, to lose its sweetness, is that for too long, they learnt only parts of Torah that they did not connect to. This is because they never looked inward at what speaks to them, but only outward, to what everyone else was learning.

Let us take this to a drone's eye view. There are three areas in religion. White. Black. And Grey. White is the area of the things that you are commanded to do. Black is the area of things that you are commanded not to do. They are both **חייב**, mandatory. The grey area, the area of **רשות**, optional, is the area where all of our spiritual dilemmas are found. Black and white are so easy.

Open up the Torah, and there it is. But the grey area is just not clear. How long to pray? How long to learn? How much Hishtadlut and how much Emunah? How much time to spend on any specific Mitzvah? How much Chessed should I do, for whom and in which way? What is the right balance, in so many areas of life? How far beyond the letter of the law should I take my Torah observance? What should I focus on in my learning? Halacha? Aggadah/Mussar/Character refinement?

Most people solve grey questions by looking around and seeing what other people are doing. But this is a huge mistake. The Chassid Yaavatz says something that can blow your mind. The hardest question for the Faithful Jew to answer is Tzaddik v'ra lo, rasha v'tov lo – "Why do good things happen to bad people, and why do bad things happen to good people?" There are many answers to this question; each one has its time and place. But the Chassid Yaavatz says that the answer, most of the time, is that a person is judged according to what he *could* do. You can have a Tzaddik who is suffering, because he can do much more than he is doing. And you can have a Rasha who is rewarded greatly, because, for who he is, that is all he can do!!! (See R Dov Yaffeh zt"l, page *שללה*)

הַלְךָ אַחֲרֵי לְבָכֶם and לא חתورو אחריו are telling us the biggest lesson in life. Go inward, go toward your C3. Focus on what *you Connect to*. Gauge yourself by what *you Can do*. And invest in your unique *Character strengths*, something we learn from Navot.

Navot HaYizraeli had a beautiful vineyard next to King Achab's palace. King Achab coveted Navot's vineyard and asked Navot if he could buy it for a heavy price; or, he would barter it for a much better vineyard, somewhere else. But Navot refused, saying that this vineyard was a family inheritance and he did not want to part with something that was so dear to his family, no matter the price. King Achab came home very upset, and his wife, Queen Izebel, asked what was wrong. He answered her,

telling her how Navot had turned down his offer. Izebel then framed Navot, saying that he cursed King Achab and the Name of G-d. She hired false witnesses, had Navot killed, and took his vineyard for her husband. (Melachim נ 21:2)

Our Rabbis ask, why was Navot HaYizraeli punished in this way? *Because he had a beautiful voice. He would go up to the Beit Hamikdash for the Holidays and sing in G-d's honor. This had become such an attraction that many people made the pilgrimage, just in his merit. One year, though, Navot stayed home, out of fear that while he was gone, someone would loot his vineyard. His punishment was death, and that his field be taken from him*

Why was Navot punished so severely for not singing in the Beit Hamikdash? Shlomo Hamelech taught **כִּבְדֵ אֶת־יְהֹוָה** *Honor Hashem from your wealth.* (Mishlei 3:9) What does that mean to honor Hashem "from your wealth"? Our Rabbis learn, **אֲלֹת תְּקִרֵי מַהוּנָךְ אֶלָּא מַחְנִינָךְ**, *Don't read this passuk to mean to honor Hashem with your money. Learn it to mean that you are to honor G-d with what He graced you with* (See Rashi ibid.). If He has given you a pleasant voice, honor Him with that (see Pesikta Rabti 25; see Kaf HaChaim 54).

This sheds light on understanding our Tafkid, our unique mission in this world, our calling. Focusing on others' strengths leaves us feeling weak. Focusing on our own strengths is what makes us strong. One of the greatest regrets in life is realizing that you lived a life that others wanted you to be, rather than being yourself. And one of the greatest joys in life is the joy of celebrating your uniqueness, the original and authentic you. **שְׁמַח בְּלֹדוֹתֶיךָ**. Our Rabbis teach that the saving grace for Kohelet is how King Solomon ends the statement. **וְעַכְיָה עַל־כָּל־אֱלֹהָה יִרְאֶה קָלָלִים בְּמַשְׁפַּט**. Know that whatever you do in life, you will have to answer up to Heaven that you have done your best, and you have used G-d's gifts to serve Him (Vayikra Rabba 28a).

Never forget these words of King Solomon. You were born an original. Don't die a copy. (1317)



# THE PREDICTABLY IRRATIONAL F.O.M.O.

The spies were great men. How did they make such a grave mistake?

The Targum Zohar 3; 158 says that all of the spies were men of stature and high position. But they decided upon this evil plan of speaking negatively about the Land. Why? Because they said to themselves, “If the Jews enter the Land, we will lose the positions that we had in the desert, and Moshe will appoint new people to fill our posts.” And because of their evil plot, they died, and all those who accepted their report perished.

How could it be that such great men would plan to go against the Divine Plan of bringing the Jewish People into the Land of Israel? How could this irrational thought enter their minds? Didn’t they realize that the plan of going against G-d’s plan and against Moshe was much riskier than losing out on their positions?

The answer is a lesson about FOMO, one of the most powerful drives of Man.

What is the drive behind digital addiction, email checking, social networks? What is the drive for men to look, sometimes, where they are not supposed to? What is hiding in the shadows of every jealous thought? What is the secret force behind all marketing? Why do people check out what is going on in their email account more than they check out how their children are managing and feeling? Why do some students have a hard time focusing on their studies, feeling the need to check out what is going on outside the study hall?

F.O.M.O. Fear of missing out. Fear can motivate you to do things faster than your mind can think. Fear is an emotion with a pathway in the brain that is connected to your reflex to take action, like the “fight or flight” response to danger. G-d wired the human brain in such a way that if you see a snake in your bedroom, you run before you think. The fear of missing out, also, is an emotion, and before you have a chance to decide, to hash out if this

fleeting option is for your best or not, your body has already responded to the stimuli.

This is why people opt for something that is not the best choice for them, just because they are afraid they may miss something, even if the something is less significant than the loss they would suffer by choosing this option. This irrationally is predictable. We buy something that is 50 percent off, even if we do not NEED the item, because we feel that if we don’t take it, we are losing out 50 percent of the price; but in reality, we are losing 100% of the money paid, if we do not need the item to begin with. It is scientifically proven that people have this irrational tendency, to choose a less valuable option, just because they may miss out by not responding to it. If you want people to buy your product fast, you need to throw in a FOMO factor. This is the trigger for digital addiction, obsessive email checking, and social network addiction. Being “Phoneless” has become a fear for most millennials, as if without their cell, a part of their psyche is N/A (non-available). Why? Because that fear of missing out can drive you crazy. Once we know that we are not missing out on anything, calmness sets in. Until then, we have this nagging inner voice that says, “You just don’t know what you are missing”. Until we define for ourselves, clearly, what is involved, our actions take over, ignoring the advice of our minds. The spies might have been dealing with this same FOMO symptom, fear of losing their positions, and they were ignoring the great loss they would suffer because of the option they were choosing.

How does one nip FOMO in the bud?

I believe that the threats that we are not aware of are a greater threat than the threats we are aware of. Awareness is an important key to the solution. Recognizing the heavy price you are paying because of your FOMO. Awareness of the fact that it is just an emotion, not a reflection of reality. Realizing that is just a fear. As mentioned, the



reason why FOMO takes over is because it does not get processed. The impulse is faster than the thought. The solution is to decelerate our

impulsiveness, realizing how emotion has taken over, and how much hurt it can cause.

## Self Esteem of a Grasshopper

ונני בעינינו כחברים וכן הינו בעיניהם (יג, לג)

"We were like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and that is how we were perceived by the Canaanites as well"

This is how the spies sent by Moshe described their encounter with the Canaanites while on their mission in the Land of Israel. When we read this description, though, we wonder how the spies could possibly have known how the enormous Canaanites perceived them. Rashi asks this question, and explains that the spies also reported that they heard the Canaanites saying to one another: There are ants in the vineyards that look like humans.

Still, the spies' description remains puzzling: Even if the spies intended to relate to the Jewish People their relatively diminutive appearance, why did they mention how they perceived themselves? Furthermore, we need to understand the change in terminology: The spies quote the gigantic Canaanites as calling them ants. Yet, they report that they perceived themselves – and were perceived by the Canaanites – as grasshoppers. How can we understand this switch?

The answers to these questions throw light on an important concept. The Canaanite perception of the Jewish spies as ants was the direct outcome of the spies' self-perception as grasshoppers! When we perceive ourselves as being incapable or inept, this invites others to belittle us further. This was the spies' gravest sin. They viewed themselves as being in a pitiable state, and infected the rest of the Jewish People with this self-image as well. Indeed, the Baal HaTurim comments that the reason the Jews suffered the Destruction of the Temple and are still in exile is the assessment the Jew makes of himself as being small in the eyes of the nations.

It is not surprising, then, that at the very end of the horrible curses of Parashat Ki Tavo – sequenced according to severity – we find the following: the Jews will be put up for sale as slaves to the gentile nations, but no-one will want to buy them (28:68). No further curses or punishments are mentioned, as if to say: this is the lowest level to which the Jewish nation can fall. This is the direct result of their perceiving themselves as worthless.

And this concept applies to each and every one of us. If we believe that we have no worth – that is all the worth we ultimately have.

### Exciting news...

I am starting a summer podcasts series! These podcasts will be similar to the Women's Chabura classes but in an extremely condensed version. I will present the problem at hand, the Torah Wisdom, and the "Selfie Steps", the concrete tools that will allow you to transform your lives. Sign up via email and you will receive the link to download these podcasts, so that you can listen at your own leisure. I hope these 15 minute bursts of Torah Growth will help you reach your personal summer goals.

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