



Parashat Shlach



English version

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## THE ART OF DEESCALATION

Tisha B'av is a night when we cry each year over the Destructions of the two Temples, because we cried the night the spies came back with their report, over nothing that warranted that we cry at all. **וַיִּבְכּוּ הָעָם בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא** And the Nation cried that night... Our Rabbis teach us that from that night of crying over the spies on the night of Tisha B'Av that year, Tisha B' Av became the night of mourning for the Jewish people, a night to cry.

Isn't that a bit harsh? So much pain and suffering that we have 'til today because of one night, thousands of years ago in the desert, when my ancestors cried wrongly??!! What do I have to do with that sin? Don't our Rabbis teach that a person does not get punished for the sins of his forefathers, unless he has that sin himself...? What have I done wrong – in what way am I considered following in the ways of my ancestors, that I have to suffer?

In Megillat Eichah that we read each year on Tisha B'av, when we cry over the destruction of the two temples, there is something interesting. Yirmiyahu the prophet laments over the destructions, but hints to the root of it all. The root of the Destruction is the sin of the Spies, but what was the root of the sin of the spies?? At the beginning of every passuk, the first letters are in alphabetic order. Except one letter in chapters 2,3, and 4. The letters Ayin and Peh. Ayin means eyes, and Peh means mouth. Megillat Eichah switched the two around, and put Peh/ Mouth before Ayin/Eye, because the spies said with their mouths what they did not see with their eyes!!!

The root of the sin of the Spies was that they did not say, only what they saw. *They added their own*

*perspective.* “It is okay to say, **וַיִּהְיוּ כַּחַגְבִּים** “We felt like grasshoppers, compared to the giants of Canaan”. But you can't say, **וְכֹן הָיִינוּ כַּחַגְבִּים** that we were perceived like grasshoppers by the Canaanites! How do you know what they think of you??? No one asked the spies for their perspective in their report of the Land, and especially, they were not asked to report their perspective to the masses! If they would have reported to Moshe privately what they felt, the story would have ended very differently! It is not up to them to decide that the Canaanites will be too difficult for G-d and His People to take out of the Land! **כִּי־הִזְק** **וַיִּבְנֶה** while he was in Hebron, praying. When Kalev saw these giants, he saw that their faces were pale, he saw death on their faces, **כָּרְ אַפְּהֵם מֵעֲלֵיהֶם**. The spies, though, intentionally hid this important piece of information from their report!

All my articles are self-help Torah articles. This concept of disconnecting the reality from your version of it is one of the keys to self-help. Your thinking is dependent on 4 Ss. State of Mind, Structure, Social, and... Story. You don't think how you want to think, you think according within these 4 Ss. Your version of your story, is your story. Your version of your story, is what brings you to overstress in stressful situations. Every time we become overstressed, we sin, with the sin of the spies, and we bring about destruction. Allow me to explain.

One of the greatest keys to the gates of serenity is getting in the Now. Moving past the past. Ignoring

the fears of the future. How do you get into the Now? Simple. You notice the Now, and you get into the Now. Notice your breathing, notice your thinking, notice that you are alive. Notice the choices you have, all your options, and the choices you don't have. Notice your strengths, and notice your weaknesses. Notice the good and notice the bad. Notice the smell, the air, and cherish the moment. Notice that G-d is *הי וקיים*, aware and existent, wherever you are. We are meant to go in His way and be like Him, to be aware and existent.

In meditation, there is a practice called Naked Sound. Perceiving the sounds you are hearing without any mental interpretation, judgment or labeling. Simply observe sounds as they arise without attaching any meaning or narrative to them. We get caught up in thoughts about the sound, identifying its source, recalling memories associated with it. Instead, focus solely on the sensory experience of hearing the sound itself. This practice encourages a non-reactive state of mind, fostering a deeper sense of calm and mindfulness. Why is a nonreactive state of mind the key to being calm? Because stressful circumstances don't cause us stress: it is our reaction that causes us stress. The escalation of stress from the raw circumstance is what causes the stress, not the circumstance itself.

When I help couples with their Shalom Bayit, I let them talk to me, about what bothers them with their spouse, in front of their spouse. But they are not allowed to talk to each other when they are expressing their offense about their spouse, or their defense on their spouse's claim. All communication is through me, so that things don't escalate. I help them both to understand where their spouse is coming from, what is the underlying pain, weakness, issue. I make sure that the problem does not escalate beyond the issue at hand and metamorphose into something personal. I try to help each spouse to enter into their partners "shoes" and understand them a bit better. This is very dangerous, because they bring out all their accusations against each other in front of another person. So, how do we end this conversation with a

safe landing? At the end of each session like this, I ask them if we can do a sure-love exercise.

"Before you talk to each other again, after you have aired all that bothers you about your spouse, I want you, one at a time, to say to your spouse what you love about them, why you married them, what you appreciate about them. Look them in the eye, and tell them how much you love them! It gets very emotional though, because each one needs to do this on a timer for at least 3 minutes!!! Try telling the person you love why you love them, looking straight into their eyes, for three minutes, and you will see that you will both start crying.

Why is this such a powerful exercise? Because it deescalates the issue from becoming something personal. Issues can be dealt with. Taking things personally can't be dealt with. When Korah challenged Moshe with questions like why we need tzitzit on a Tallit that is all Tchelet, or a Mezuzah on a room that is full of Sefrei Torah, Moshe never answered the questions! Because the root of these questions was something personal: Moshe, we don't need you as a leader, because we are all holy men! The Mishna in Avot tells us that Hillel and Shamai disagreed, but Korah and his Edah *didn't disagree with Moshe*; once it was on a personal level, Moshe was not going to answer.

This is why we cry on Tisha B'Av, because we still suffer from escalating issues, saying with our mouths what our eyes did not see. Escalations avalanche too fast into something that can destroy any marriage, can cause people to want to commit suicide or overdose, throw a struggling teen out of the house, etc. It can make a Bar Kamtza, who was hurt over an invitation, to cause a whole nation to go into exile for 2000 years.

Here is a list of the most common stresses found in "regular" people, according to Chat GPT: Work and school deadlines, debt, breakups of family, of friends, of partners, health issues, getting married or divorced, starting a new job or ending one, having a baby, uncertainty, social pressures of fitting in, feeling judged and keeping up to



expectations. Perfectionism and high standards, and more.

For us Ultra Orthodox Jews, Chat GPT says we have some added stressors: Keeping halacha, Shabbat, Kashrut, educational pressures of ensuring a religious education while meeting secular education standards, financial challenges of providing for a large family, dealing with family members who don't share the same levels of religious adherence, supporting religious institutions, balancing a strong religious identity while integrating into a broader society, anti-semitism and more.

When a robot tells me that my stressors are normal, I somehow feel calmer. Why? It used to bother me that when I heard other people going through difficulties that I am going through, it would cause me to be calmer. I used to feel, hey - what's wrong with me? Am I happy that others are suffering? What a Rasha I must be!!

But that is not the truth! Our Rabbis quote a famous pearl of wisdom: צרת רבים חצי נחמה. When the difficulty is a difficulty of one person alone, that is what is painful. When it is a difficulty shared by others, it is half a consolation! Why? Because then it is not personal anymore!!! This is just the normal way of life!! The stressor is not the circumstance! It is your escalating it, taking it personally, that is the problem! It is not that these stressors don't bring stress. Those stressors are part of being alive and the price of existence. Only the dead have no stress at all! The escalation of those issues, though, is what causes stress to become unbearable. So, one way of deescalating stress is to stop taking it personally. Try to "unpersonalize" the whole thing; try to look at your issue, as if you were Chat GPT.

Another escalation is making the problem permanent. The problem can be dealt with, if you look at it as a temporary issue. The problem is when you visualize mental images as this is how things will remain forever. Instead of thinking, "I

can't handle this", try to think, I can manage this, one step at a time.

Another escalation is making the problem pervasive. Pervasive means you think of the problem worse than it actually is. When you challenge the thoughts that you have when you have stress, questioning their accuracy, considering alternatives you can come up with more balanced perspectives.

The first step to deal with life stressors is to take back your power of choice, to choose how to respond. I mentioned Chat GPT's list of most common life stressors, to help you not to take anything personally in the stressful circumstances, realizing that these are all normal stressors. When you examine evidence for your stressful thoughts, you will be able to reframe the stressors in a more constructive manner. Then, you can take action, small steps, towards improving the situation.

If you are feeling stressed, go for a walk. Change the scenery, but most importantly, defuse the stressor from the escalation of the stress. Remember, that you have only three things you can manage in life. מעשה, דיבור, מחשבה. You can choose the way you think. You can choose the way you communicate. And you can choose which actions to take. Focus on managing those three, and only those three. You can't manage time, you can't manage the people in your life and you can't manage G-d.

Don't try to deal with your stress alone. Reach out to friends and family members, reach out to mentors and therapists. Remember. If they would have just asked Moshe first, things would not have escalated like they did. Most importantly, reach out to G-d. He is always listening. If you can't figure out a solution, make sure in Arvit, you say the following words with more Kavana ותקנו מלכנו בעצה טובה מלפניך, *And set us aright before You, our King, with good advice*, And don't tell Him how big your problems are. Tell your problems how big G-d is.



## THE ART OF NOT BEING AFRAID

A person can bring himself miracles, save himself, and protect himself by meditating on the concept of אין עוד מלבדו: there is no power or will in the world, other than the power and will of a One G-d. (Nefesh Hachaim 3;12) No one can hurt me, if G-d does not allow it. If a person trusts in Hashem that He will fill all of his needs, Heaven will fulfill his prayers. But if a person does not believe, if a person is worried, it is decided in Heaven that he will be lacking in Parnassah. (Kedushat Levi Beshalach ידוע ורהנה)

Worrying is not Jewish. Fear is not Jewish, unless it is fear of G-d and His Word, enveloped by awe and a very lofty respect. The Torah commands the judge not to fear the offender, once the law of the Torah is clear to the judge, once it is clear to the judge what is the word of G-d in the case. לֹא תִגְדֹּר לְאִישׁ מִפְּנֵי אִישׁ (Devarim 1;17) If the judge or the Rabbi may lose his money or his job by ruling against the offender, he should still not fear the offender. Even if he may risk his personal safety or the safety of his family members, it is questionable if a judge or Rabbi is allowed to not say the truth of the Torah, out of fear of getting hurt physically. This is all because we believe, אין עוד מלבדו, there is no power in the world, other than G-d.

G-d is everything, אֵתָהּ מוֹשֵׁל בְּכֹל, and G-d is good, לְכֹל is something we say at the start of each day of our lives. No one can do anything, not even the Nazis, if G-d does not allow it. “Zyklon”, the name of the gas used in the gas chambers has the same numerical value as the word used in the Torah to describe G-d’s wrath, חֲרָה. We know that Judaism teaches that the hearts of world leaders are in the hands of G-d. לְבַיִתָּהּ בְּיַד ה' (Mishlei 21;1) How ironic, that the last name of President Biden, who no one can understand what is going on in his head, has the same numerical value as אֱלֹקִים, your G-d, for Biden is just a puppet of G-d! No one can do anything to you, without G-d allowing it, and if there are sins, they sometimes take their toll. We can pray. We can repent. But it is not the *person* that we are afraid of: it is our sins.

As the stock market enters a bear market, I am reminded of the words that got us out of the Great Depression, from the first words of FDR’s inaugural speech: “There is nothing to fear but fear, itself.” When the fear holds you back from living your fullest life, it is definitely worth facing, familiarizing and fighting, in order to live your life to the max.

Fear is something worth acknowledging, in order to understand what is holding you back, what is keeping you safe, or what you need to face. The most common rational fears people have are of poverty, criticism, sickness, loss of love, rejection, old age and death. The most common phobias, or irrational fears people have, are of spiders, snakes, dogs, dentists, heights, flying, highway driving, public speaking and needles. The most common primal fears are fear of loud sounds, of falling, of cramped spaces, of open spaces, of darkness, of shame and of being injured. The most common fears that women have are the fear of standing up for themselves and speaking up, traveling alone, being judged, not looking the way they want to. The greatest fears of teens are fear of not being successful, closing doors on possible future opportunities, making mistakes that will mess up their future and not being accepted by their peers. The biggest fears in business are the fears of failure, of change, of taking a risk, of letting others down, not having proof of concept, not being able to balance everything. The common fears of the Torah Jew are wasting time, taking away hours from learning Torah, bad influences, immodest sights, social media, not properly filtered smart phones, not having nearby a good school for the kids, not having a minyan, kosher food, fear of dogs, fear of living life without accountability to G-d, saying the wrong blessing, speaking lashon hara and fear of the Final Judgement. The common fears of the not-so-religious Jews are fears of Rabbis and the ultra-religious, fear of fanaticism, fear of not being “normal” in the eyes of the non-religious and of the non-Jewish, fear of assimilation and fear of missing out on the best of



both worlds, Olam Hazeh and Olam Haba. It almost seems as if all human behavior is governed by fear. Some fears are legitimate, and some are not. People spend a lot of money to help them deal with their fears, and many times it is money well spent, although many times, it is not.

G-d won't make miracles, though, until you stop being afraid, until you calm down. Yehoshua sent the spies into Yericho to construct battle plans, even though the war was eventually won with G-d fighting, with clearly open Heavenly miracles, alone. Why? Because the Jews were afraid of the Cana'anites, and when there is fear, G-d does not make miracles. Only after the Jews heard from the spies that the Cana'anites were petrified of the Jewish people, Yehoshua knew that G-d would start performing miracles. This is why the Torah commands that the Jewish soldiers who were afraid of the war needed to be sent back home. Because fear spreads. And when there is fear, there is no place for miracles.

This is how Rabenu Bachye explains the words of Yehoshua and Kalev to the spies and to the frightened Jewish nation, before Yehoshua and Kalev were nearly stoned by the frightened people. אָדָּה בְּיַקְנֹק אֶל־תְּמַרְדּוֹ וְאַתֶּם אֶל־תִּירְאוּ אֶת־עַם הָאֲרָץ כִּי לֹחֲמֵנוּ הֵם סָר צֵלָם מֵעַלֵיכֶם וַיִּקְנֹק אֶתְנוּ אֶל־תִּירְאֵם (Bamidbar 14:9) *But in YKVK don't rebel, and you shall not fear the nation of the Land, for they are (easy to be consumed as) our bread. Their "shade" (their merit and protection) has been removed from upon them, and YKVK is with us; don't fear them. Why is it considered that fearing the Cana'anites is rebelling G-d?!?*

## THE ART OF WEARING TZITZIT

The Maggid from Dubno would tell the following story. A man walking in the forest noticed a small house that seemed vacant, but there was a voice of an old man, crying, inside. He hurried over to the house to make sure that everyone was okay, but the front door, that had a mezuzah on it, was locked. He knocked, but no answer. He banged hard on the door, as he could not ignore the sound. He moved over to the window, broke it open and climbed into the house, calling out, asking, if everyone was

Sometimes, fear can be seen as so severe in Heaven that it is considered as if you are rebelling against G-d. Being that אין עוד מלבדו, there is nothing else in the world, other than G-d, when G-d gives a promise, worrying that He is not able to keep His promise, is rebelling against Him. When the spies claimed that the people in the Land were stronger, they were saying that the nations are stronger than G-d, Has Veshalom. As Rashi comments: הזק הוא ממנו - כביכול כלפי מעלה אמרו, which is definitely a rebellious thought. It is considered a rebellion, when G-d tells you what to do, or how to believe, or what is going to happen, and due to the circumstances, you doubt it. Your fear of giants, of scary people, of getting hurt, or of dying, can mean that you don't believe in G-d's sovereign rule of the world, and that is considered a rebellion.

And when we will no longer be afraid, we will be titled Tzaddik. Do you know where Yosef got the title of Yosef Hatzaddik from? *When the wife of Potiphar tried to seduce Yosef, she threatened him saying, I will throw you in jail. He said to her, השם מתיר אסורים. G-d releases the imprisoned. You can't lock me up, if G-d won't allow it. She then threatened, I will break your back! He responded השם זוקף כפופים. G-d uplifts those who are bent over. You can't break my back if G-d won't allow it. She then threatened, I will blind out your eyes! To which Yosef responded, השם פוקח עיוורים. G-d opens the eyes of the blind!!!* Because he was not afraid of his boss's wife's threats, he was called, Yosef Hatzaddik!! (Avot DR' Natan 16)

okay. But the cries just continued. This man continued to search throughout the small house, that seemed a bit messy, as if the owner had gone on some sort of trip. He followed the sound of the cries of that old man, all the way to the bedroom closet. He opened the closet,... and there was no one inside! There was just a Tallit, a crying Tallit!

He asked the Tallit, why are you crying? The Tallit said, "The owner went on a trip and took everything he needed: his passport, credit card,

clothes and sunglasses. But he forgot me! He even came back a second time, because he forgot his cellphone charger, but he forgot me, again!” The man who came to help tried to console the Tallit, that it was not intentional, or other consolations. But nothing calmed the Tallit – until the Tallit said, “There is one thing that will console me! I know that there will be a trip, a long journey, on which my owner will not be able to take anything else he owns... just me. No phone, no credit card, no sunglasses, no clothing... just me. When he dies, when he goes to the next world, he will be buried with me, with his Tallit, and nothing else, because only one who wears Tzitzit can merit to see G-d. (Menachot 43b) And, up in Heaven, in the Heavenly court, they will ask me to testify, about my owner’s adherence to the 613.”

Tzitzit is numerical value of 600. There are 8 strings, and five knots, a total of 613. Every minute you wear Tzitzit, (wool for Sefardic), is equal to performing all the 613 mitzvot. As Tzitzit is the reminder of the 613 that we are supposed to do for Him and is the rope that He throws to us, to grab onto and save us spiritually from the physical world we are drowning in.

The Tzitzit is given that name, after the word, הַגִּידָה עֹמֵד אַחַר כְּתֻלְנֵי מִשְׁגֵּיחַ מִן־הַחַלּוֹנוֹת מִצִּיץ מִן־הַקְּרָקִים. Behold, *This one, he is standing behind our wall, watching from the window, peeking from the cracks.* צִיצִית, Tzitzit, means “double peeking”: G-d is peeking at us, watching over us, to see how much spiritually we infuse into our physical lives. While we are also peeking out at G-d, connecting spiritual “strings” to our physical world and lives.

I remember, 24 years ago, at the onset of the summer between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade, playing baseball, I swung the bat too far and I pulled my left leg out of the socket, something I never thought could happen. The doctor did not let me go to summer sleep-away camp that year, as I needed crutches; and, no running for a month and a half. At the end of the time off running, I was learning Mishna Brurah, that although there is no mitzvah to wear Tzitzit at night, still, it should be worn for protection. I wondered what type of protection

tzitzit can provide for me; after all, they are only strings!

That night, I walked down the poorly lit, no sidewalk, Washington Drive, from my house in Deal, N.J., towards the Deal Shul, to catch the 10 p.m. Arvit. It was a beautiful Deal summer night, and my leg was feeling better, and I started running, and it felt good. I heard a car coming from behind me, but I was sure that driver saw me. Suddenly, the car screeched to a stop right next to me! The window rolled down, and it was two of my older brother’s friends, calling out to me: “Are you crazy?! We were going 60 miles an hour, right behind you into your back, and we could not see you at all; you are wearing a black jacket, black pants, black socks and shoes and a black yarmulke... Get in the car; we’ll take you to shul!” I was frightened, and I asked them what they actually saw on me that caused them not to run me over: “As we got real close, we suddenly saw white strings, jumping up and down!” I usually keep my Tzitzit strings in my pants, but because I was running, they must have popped out, and served as reflectors!

Tzitzit is your protection from any danger, physical or spiritual. For this reason, one should not take off his Tallit until after Aleinu, so that the prosecuting angels can’t interrupt any part of your prayer. And this is why, when a person is buried, or when a person sleeps, he wears Tzitzit that protect him from any prosecuting angels.

A person is not supposed to show Tzitzit strings in the Jewish cemetery, because it causes the dead people there to be jealous. They do not mind, they are not jealous, if you come with a fancy car, fancy clothes, or a fancy wife wearing fancy jewelry. That doesn’t make them jealous, in the slightest. But tzitzit strings!!!! The jealousy is too strong for the dead to handle!

Its only here, in this 120-year trip, that you can connect with a spiritual connection to everything physical. It is only here that you can have a special, unique connection with G-d, where He will protect



you, physically and spiritually, in the darkest of places.

The Torah commands us to wear blue Techelet strings when we have the Chilazon fish whose blood we use as the blue dye. Why? So that when we look at the blue string, it will remind us of the blue sea, the blue sky, and G-d's throne. But why do we need to look at a blue string at all? Why can't we just look at the blue sky and remind ourselves of G-d?

The answer is because what a person sees, the way a person perceives, is influenced by his passions and desires. וְלֹא־תִהְיוּ אַחֲרֵי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם Do not stray after your hearts, and after your eyes. Why heart, and then eyes? Don't we interpret with our hearts what we see with our eyes? The answer is, NO!!! We interpret what we see with our eyes, with how we feel with our hearts. The Techelet strings are to remind you about your Tachlit, your purpose, and when you focus on your purpose, you can ignore your passions. If you would just look at

### MAN WITH A MISSION

You always have two choices. You can live your life as if you were created for a purpose, for a mission. There is rhyme and reason to why you were created, and why you are here now. Or, you can live your life as if it is a random existence, as if your being born was no more than happenstance, void of meaning. An atheist does not have to answer why he was created or why he is here. Judaism is the belief that you had and have a Creator who conducts everything in your life. (First of the 13 Ikrim of the Rambam).

This is one of the biggest choices you can make in life, both in general and on a minute-to-minute basis. This decision will determine what type of Jew you will be, how motivated you will be, how productive you will be, and whether or not, or how much, you will be rewarded in the World to Come. Seeing yourself as being on a mission to fulfill the purpose of your creation, or not, is the deciding factor whether or not you will be considered an עַבְד עֵי, a servant of G-d. (Rabenu Yonah Shaarei Teshuva 2;22)

the sky, alone, you would not see the same sky as the one who is thinking about his life's purpose!

Tzitzit has so many segulot, including having children, specifically boys, that keep mitzvot. וְעִשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִת עַל-כַּנְּפֵי בְּגָדֵיהֶם לְדִרְתָּם, *for their generations*. This is why the minhag is for the bride to buy her husband a Tallit for a present for the wedding, and when a girl is not finding her shidduch, there is a segula for her to buy a Tallit for her future husband.

When Mashiach comes, each Jew who was particular to wear Tzitzit will merit having 2,800 gentiles *who will beg* to be his slaves. (Shabbat 32b) What is a person going to do with so many slaves? I don't know. You can ask Eliyahu Hanavi soon. But one thing for sure, never feel embarrassed from the gentile, now, when you wear your tzitzit. Because, when you wear Tzitzit like a proud Jew, you are living for a purpose, G-d is watching over you, and protecting you, and one day, it will all become clear to the world.

Being a servant of G-d has many levels. The more aware you are of G-d in the present, past, and future, and the more you place your interests, emotions, passions, desires, ego secondary to your serving the Creator, the greater servant you are. The more you understand this, the more you will live with motivation to obey His Torah and commandments. You will be enthusiastic about serving your Creator. You will have a jump in your step to serve Him.

This is the main theme of the hero of our Parasha, Kalev Ben Yefuneh. וְעַבְדִי כָלֵב עֶקֶב הָיְתָה רִיחַ אֲחֵרָה עִמּוֹ. וַיִּמְלֵא אַחֲרָי. *And My servant Kalev, because he had a different spirit with him, and he "filled after Me."* (Bamidbar 14) How did Kalev deserve having the Torah crown him with the greatest title in the world, "Servant of G-d"? A title reserved for the greatest men of our nation, like Moshe Rabbenu or David Hamelech?

Kalev endangered his life to visit the Maarat Hamachpela to report the good news to the

Patriarchs and Matriarchs that their children are about to come back home. He prayed there to G-d that he will follow in their footsteps as G-d's servant, to be enveloped with the same **רוח אהרת** as his ancestors, to have their unique spirit. What is this other spirit? This is the spirit of our Patriarchs, that he went to pray to access, when he prayed at the Maarat Hamachpella in Hebron. The Patriarchs who stood in the face of adversity, who put their lives on the line for a greater purpose than themselves, had this different spirit. It was clear to them that the day will come when they will have to give an accounting to G-d if they fulfilled their duty or not. This explains the end of the passuk, literally, in the Hebrew, *“and he filled after Me.”*

What did he fill? He fulfilled his mission, the purpose he was destined to complete. (Ein Yaakov; R' Shimshon R' Hirsch)

This acknowledgment that he had a G-d to answer to is what gave Kalev the strength to stand up against the ten spies. This is what gave Kalev the power to put his life in danger like Hur, his son, who was murdered for standing up against the masses at the Sin of the Golden Calf. This nature is what gave Kalev's shadchan the idea to set him up with Miriam (a.k.a. Efrat). Miriam rebelled against her father, Amram's ruling, for men to separate from their wives under Pharaoh's rule in Egypt, and Kalev rebelled against the spies' plot. (Vayikra Rabbah 1;3) It was not just that they were both rebellious. It was that they both understood the mission they were on in life and were willing to stand up against their world, knowing that they would eventually have to report an accounting of their actions to G-d. This is why his name was Kalev Ben Yefuneh. Kalev is like the world Kelev, a dog. A dog is man's best friend because it gives attention and shows affection to its owner. Kel lev, all heart. Kalev dedicated his whole heart to doing his mission for his Creator. Ben Yefuneh, that he turned away from the Spies' plot.

It is not a coincidence that King David's royal lineage came from this relationship of Kalev and Miriam. (One of Kalev's granddaughters was King David's great grandmother. See Maharsha Sotah

11b) This is what empowered David to be an Eved Hashem, to stand in the face of adversity, his brothers, Goliath, Plishtim, to stand alone with G-d and face life's challenges, no matter what they are.

The first of the Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith is just this: G-d is “alive.” **יגדל אלקים חי** He is running everything in our life. Everything that is happening in our everyday lives is G-d, setting up the stage for us to do what He expects of us. This will open up a new world in front of you, a life filled with constant mindfulness as it did so to the greatest men of our Nation. When King David was cursed by Shimi Ben Gera, he perceived it as a message from G-d. When R' Akiva saw water dripping onto a rock and slowly making a hole in it, he saw a message from G-d.

Avraham Fried has this incredible song about how it is not so simple to be a simple Jew. Pashut Anashim. *What does it mean to be a simple Jew? To be a nice guy, to smile, to accept with love all that happens to us. To be a giver, to be able to say that I have everything in life, even when it does not seem like it. To truly love everyone and try to make their day, even when it does not look like they love me. To not rush through life and never take anything personally, even if it hurts, because anyway it will all just pass. A life of being real, a life that does not need to draw attention.*

When becoming G-d's servant, we can merit to become the most exalted creature in the universe: the simple Jew. How? When you accept that it was and is G-d who set up everything in your life for you to be a man with a mission, your soul will sing the eternal song of the simple Jew, G-d's servant. And you will rejoice all day long, as in everything you do, you are serving Him. Just as the Torah promises that those who serve G-d, are full of happiness and have a heart packed with goodness. (Devarim 28;47)

Selfie Steps to being G-d's servant:

1. Prayer. (Zohar Vayikra 25,55) When you pray for health, financial serenity, wisdom, forgiveness..., you are displaying that only



He is Boss. When you mention in your prayers how awesome He is, how He saved you from Egypt, how He constantly redeems you, you are displaying that all that you have is from His kindness, which makes you indebted to serve Him.

2. Live in Eretz Yisrael. Eretz Yisrael is called Eretz Canaan, even after the Canaanites left, because it is the land where people are נכנע, where people become subservient to G-d, and place spirituality before physicality and before materialism. (R' Dov Yaffeh zt"l)
3. Wear Tzitzit. This garment is meant to remind us that we are G-d's servants. (Or Hachaim)
4. Mezuzah on your door. Every time you kiss it, electrify yourself with your belief

that He is in total control of everything that happens to you.

5. Tefillin. Every morning you wrap your arm in it, dedicate all your emotions to serving Him. And every time you crown yourself with the Tefillin Shel Rosh, dedicate all your thought to being subservient to Him.
6. Begin and end each day saying Adon Olam and the thirteen principles of faith of the Rambam.
7. Most of all, learn Torah that speaks to you. Gain access to a Rabbi who you believe is going to tell you what G-d is telling you.

### THE MITZVAH TO BE YOURSELF

At least twice a day, we recite the words וְלֹא־תָחוּרוּ וְאֶחָדֵיכֶם לִבְכֶם וְאֶחָדֵיכֶם עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם זֹנִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם. *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 תָחוּרוּ, which comes from the root word spying, looking for something new, or wandering? It would be more appropriate to say, וְלֹא תִלְכּוּ אַחֲרֵי וְאֶחָדֵיכֶם לִבְכֶם 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, שִׂמְחָה בְּתוֹרַת בְּיָלְדוּתְךָ ... וְהִלַּךְ בְּדַרְכֵי רֵעֶךָ *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 תָחוּרוּ, 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. תָחוּרוּ, wandering after your heart, would mean looking outward, at what everyone else is doing. רַבִּי אוֹמֵר אִיזְהוּ דְרַךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁיבוֹר. 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, לֹא תָחוּרוּ, 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. Tzitzit strings are meant to remind us of 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. 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, אין אדם לומד תורה אלא ממקום שליבו *A person learns only what his heart desires, as we see in the Passuk כי אם בתורת ה' הפצו* (Avodah Zarah 19a) One of the greatest causes for people to leave learning, to lose its sweetness, is that for too long, they learned only the 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 הובה, 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 לעבדך באמת R Dov Yaffeh zt"l, page שלה)

הלך אחר לבך and לא תתורו אחרי לבבכם is teaching 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 2;21 א)

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 את־יקונק מהוּגָה *Honor Hashem from your wealth.* (Mishlei 3;9) What does that mean to honor Hashem “from your wealth?” Our Rabbis learn, אל תקרי מהונך אלא מהינדך, *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 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

### GLASSES OF ANXIETY

The story of the Spies is one of the greatest mysteries of the Torah. The punishment resulting from their report was of the harshest possible, with ramifications felt until the present day. Instead of being allowed to enter the Land of Canaan immediately, Bnei Yisrael had to remain for forty years in the desert, where a whole nation of people from the age 20 died. Tisha B'av, the night when the Jews wept over the Spies' report, was destined to be the night of future crying over the destruction of the two Temples. We still cry over this story of the Spies once a year.

We can conclude that what the Spies did must have been a very grave sin. We know, on the other hand, that the Spies were great and pious men who were handpicked by G-d and Moshe. They were *Nessiim*, leaders of the people. We may, and should, ask ourselves: what brought these men to fall to such a low level, actually speaking *lashon hara* about the Land? How could men of such stature be guilty of heresy, saying that even G-d cannot fight such strong nations?

The Targum Zohar (3;58) writes that they took counsel and plotted with one another, "If we enter the Land of Israel, we will be asked to resign as *Nessiim*. Only in the desert did we merit to being *Nessiim* and leading the people. But in Israel, Moshe will assign others to take our position." So, they tried to get everyone to go back to Egypt.

This leaves us with some more questions. Why did it even occur to them that they would be voted out

life is the joy of celebrating your uniqueness, the original and authentic you. שְׂמֵחַ בְּהוֹרֵי בְּיָלְדוּתוֹיָהּ. Our Rabbis teach that the saving grace for Kohelet is how King Solomon ends the statement. וְיָדַע כִּי עַל-כָּל-עֲלֹאָה יִבְיָאָה הָאֱלֹהִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט Know that whatever you do in life, you will have to answer up to Heaven - that you did your best, and you 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.

of office? And even more so, how could such great and pious leaders make such statements, expressing disbelief in G-d, because of their egotistical desire to stay in their prestigious position of power?

Our Rabbis teach us (*Sanhedrin* 104b), "*They put the Hebrew letter פ (here refers to פה - mouth) before the letter ע (here refers to עין - eyes) and said what they did not see.*" Why does the Talmud tell us that the Spies "said what they did not see?" Didn't they say what they saw? The answer is because they said what they saw. The Spies, and the People, were full of anxiety and worries. They had just recently heard prophecy from Eldad and Meidad - that *Moshe will die and Yehoshua will bring the Jews into the land*. Eldad and Medad's prophesy was not questioned by Moshe. Everyone felt that *something* was going to happen. Either there would be a new leader, or Moshe might begin to behave differently. For the *Nessiim*, this meant a new person in power and implied that they could be voted out, that there might be a new way of leading the people. This anxiety was connected to the Jews' coming into the Land of Israel. As long as they were in the desert, Moshe would stay and so would the status quo.

As anxiety is an emotion, it does not usually let a person see things rationally. He perceives things as he *thinks* they are, without going beneath the surface of appearances. The Spies perceived reality through their eyes of anxiety. More often than not, interpretation of what people see and the "color" of



how things look - are very connected to the tint of their anxiety glasses.

Rabbi Abraham J. Twersky informs us, in "Life's Too Short!" that *Anxiety is very similar to fear. However, in fear, there is a threatening situation. In anxiety, there are no apparent threats. In anxiety, there may only be an unconscious threat, a fear of something without being aware of what it is. The person feels haunted, as if he has a premonition that something terrible is going to happen... Not knowing what it is, he or she has no way of controlling or avoiding it.*

Rabbi Twersky offers a powerful way of overcoming anxiety. It is through addressing the root of the problem: a low self-esteem. If a person looks at himself as a midget, physically, emotionally or mentally, then anything and everything can be a threat. *I will never be able to overcome this*, is the thought behind the emotion of anxiety. Strengthening belief in G-d should bring one to believing in one's self and being confident that, with G-d's help, he will be able to overcome whatever brought about the anxiety. Then, anxiety just disappears. (See Messilat Yesharim ch. 20)

We can now take a second look at the Spies' report and realize that it was what they saw from their anxiety glasses. The Spies were worried about retaining their position, believing that *they were not going to be worthy of retaining their position as Nessim*; in other words, they did not believe in themselves - a cause for anxiety. Their fears colored their perspective - twisted reality to suit their own agenda. Therefore, they saw the Land as being in such a situation that *G-d would not be strong enough to take the 7 Nations out.* And, that *the Jewish People were midgets* compared to the great giants of Canaan. That is what *they* saw, an exact reflection of their own anxiety. Being that anxiety is an emotion, it spreads from person to person like wildfire. Their projected anxiety touched the Jews until, that night, the "whole nation cried in their tents."

After learning what anxiety is, we can realize how many people suffer from it, without even knowing

*what* they are suffering from. This means that there are things in life which cause us anxiety that we think are very real. But in essence, they are only like a mirage in the desert. An anxiety mirage. These "non-realities" exist only in the mind, until they vanish into thin air when you get too close. When you talk them out, while bringing G-d into the picture and put things in a rational perspective, they just do not exist.

Generally, in life, the worst thing one can do is to think that what he sees at the surface is what is really there. This is the lesson of the *tzitzit* at the end of the *parasha*. I always wondered what it is doing here in the Torah, right next to the Spies. *When you see them (tzitzit strings) you shall remember all the Mitzvot of G-d and not stray after your hearts and eyes after which you are straying.* And, by looking at the blue strings of *tchelet* on the *tzitzit*, which remind us of the blue sky, we are able to remind ourselves of the Throne of Glory. Someone once asked R. E. Dessler how it is that by merely looking at the strings of the *tzitzit*, one can think of the Throne of Glory and remember all of the 613 Mitzot of the Torah?

R. Dessler answered him - *It does not bother you - the Halacha that forbids one to pray facing the colored clothes of a woman, hanging out to dry, because one might come to have improper thoughts during prayer. How could one start thinking improper thoughts just by looking at a colored dress? The answer is that if that is the direction of a person's thoughts, those are the thoughts that will enter his mind, for that is what he sees. If one is looking at *tzitzit* and he is concentrating on spiritual growth, he will see 613 mitzvot and the Throne of Glory, even in just a few white and blue strings.*

The *tzitzit* are teaching us how to see things. Not how they look on the *surface*. Not how things look to *us*. But to see how they look when focusing on their deeper meaning- deeper than how eyes of anxiety see things.



## SELF ESTEEM OF A GRASSHOPPER

ונדו בעינינו כחגבים וכן היינו 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. Indeed, 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.

## 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 man 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 is also an emotion. Before you have a chance to decide 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. They are afraid they may miss something, even if that 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 clearly define for ourselves, 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 ignoring the great loss they would suffer because of the option they eventually chose.

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. Recognize the heavy price you are paying because of your FOMO. Awareness of the price and awareness of the fact that it is just an emotion, is 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 curb our impulsiveness, realizing how emotion has taken over, and how much hurt it can cause.

### THE STICKEST SUBJECT

Avoiding gossip is the stickiest commandment to keep. The stickiest subjects of gossip are shidduchim, job and school interviews, and the like. In such cases, it is justified to relay negative information about a third party, to let them know what they are getting into. But not always. You cannot just relay whatever you know. “What do you know about this boy/ girl?” is a very dangerous question. Although you want to help the inquirer, there are rules and regulations that the Chafetz Chaim lists in Shemirat Halashon as to what is allowed to be relayed and what is forbidden. If you do have information that the person, *at present*, behaves with immorality (pritzut) or that

he/she comes from a family with immorality, or that he/she degrades qualified Rabbis (apikorsut), or that he/she has an emotional or physical sickness that is not known to other people, such information should be mentioned relating shidduchim, in order not to transgress the law of *על דם רעידך*, *Do not stand by as your friend gets hurt*. However, you are actually playing with fire if 1. you are not 100% sure about the negative information even if your intention is only to warn the inquirer to look further into the matter 2. you have something against the person..... 3. the negative information about inappropriate behavior morals, illness or apikorsut was relevant only in the past, or for a



short period, and the situation has since changed for the better 4. there is no substantial reason to believe that the negative condition will repeat itself 5. the information is not something that might affect their marriage or business relationship. Relaying negative information in these situations constitutes Lashon Hara in its most severe form. A Rabbi who is very familiar with the laws of Shemirat Halashon must be approached to counsel you as to what you should/ should not say. If you cannot get to a Rav, and someone asks you, for shidduchim purposes, “What do you know about this boy/ girl?” Answer his question with a question. “What exactly do you want to know?”

At times, the parent of the boy/girl the person is inquiring about is in massive debt, has a sickness, a certain negative characteristic, shlom bayit issues or is in the process of divorce. And you are not sure that this will affect the marriage of the inquirer is asking about. Hold your tongue, till you ask a Rabbi who is familiar with these laws. If one of these issues is important to the inquirer, it is his responsibility to ask specific questions. He is the one who needs to ask a direct question that you, in your position, can answer. The only way to refrain from saying the wrong thing is to learn the laws of the Chafetz Chaim on a consistent basis. This subject is so complicated that someone recently wrote a whole sefer on answering questions regarding shidduchim.

This is a law that is very hard to understand. I want to let the inquirer know what he is getting into, and I have nothing against the one who is being inquired about. I am 100 percent sure about this information, these facts. Why can't I just let him know something about the person's past that he might, anyway, soon find out, and might be upset that he did not know before, or even upset at me for not having told him earlier? If I were looking into buying a car and asked a close friend/ family member who knew all about the car, I would want him to tell me everything. And, if he withheld part of the information, I would be upset with him. So, what's the difference? I asked my Rabbi to explain

this law to me, and this is what he told me. This is a great insight into the G-dliness of Man, as well.

People are not cars; they are much more complex. People can correct themselves; they can change. They have good things and bad things, strengths that cover up weaknesses, and weaknesses that cover strengths. Cars are static, people are dynamic- their essence is constantly changing and subject to change. Also, there is a subjective way to look at things, and of course, it differs from one person to the other. What *you* would stay away from, others wouldn't. Things that bother you may not bother others. Sometimes, parents who are in debt help out their children more than those who are not. They can provide physical or emotional support, if not financial support. Even people who get “all the information” about the other side agree, two years into marriage, that things are different from what they thought, despite all their research. Irrelevant information can also be subjective, or just a perspective. Only if a person asks specific questions about things that can hurt them can you relay negative information, and even then, only with great care.

*Why did the Torah put the story of the Spies in juxtaposition to the story of Miriam's gossip about her brother and her punishment? Because these wicked people should have observed and internalized the lesson. (Rashi; Midrashim)* The sin of the Spies was gossip about the Land of Israel. Didn't they have somewhat of a purpose in letting the people know what they were getting into? Didn't Miriam have a reason to tell Aharon that Moshe's chosen celibacy was improper? After all, if the Avot stayed married, how could he behave differently? And when Yosef brought negative reports of his brothers to Yaakov, he surely had good intentions. So, why did the Torah make such a big deal of these cases of Lashon Hara, and why did these people of stature suffer so greatly?

The answer is clear. To teach us that gossip is sticky. Despite good intentions, and despite a person's greatness, gossip remains an unavoidably sticky subject.



## THE CHILD I PRAYED FOR

Josh, a yeshiva student I was coaching, whose parents gotten divorced, feared getting married and staying married. The high rate of divorce of children whose parents got divorced frightened him. Throughout the coaching process, he made a graph of percentages, to depict the chance he had for entering into a happy, lasting marriage. As a result of the coaching session we had, he realized that the figures citing high divorce rates for children from broken marriages were in no way conclusive; the study focused on children from broken homes, but did not include those who were committed to being persistent on self improvement and working on their own marriages. It did not address those marriages in which the husband was dedicated to improving on what it takes to be the best possible partner. Communication. Responsibility. Trust. And to be a supportive, caring and loving husband. Josh and I discussed the fact that it is self development, not age, which decides when a person is ready for marriage. If Josh was committed, he could overcome his “ratings”, and make it work. Still, I told him, it does not depend solely on self development. I told him the following story.

A certain father that I was coaching told me about his oldest son, who stopped being observant, while his other children all remained religious. “My oldest aced every class. He was the type of kid that did everything right. He was responsible, successful. He was such a star that I didn’t even think of praying for his success. The others were “regular kids”. Therefore, I poured out my heart to G-d, praying that they be committed to their religion and successful in life. And then, due to the strangest circumstances, my son found himself kicked out of yeshiva. Not long after, I found him, without a yarmulke.”

## WITH R’ ARUSH IN THE FOREST

Not listening to music in Sefirah is something I have difficulty with. I need music to relax while driving, to block out noise when writing in my house, and so I asked a friend what he listens to in

Before sending the spies, Moshe prayed that Yehoshua, his faithful student, not fall in the plot the spies schemed. He added the letter Yud to his original name, altering the name from Hoshea to Yehushua. This extra letter, was a prayer, *May Hashem save you from the plot of the spies.*

Moshe did not pray for any of the other spies. Why, then, did he pray for Yehushua? The answer is because Yehoshua was from the tribe of Efraim, who were descendents of Yosef. Yosef had a habit of bringing bad reports of his brothers to his father, Yaakov. Moshe was afraid that Yehoshua, specifically, would be the spy to return with the negative report, due to his inborn trait from his ancestor. As he was Moshe’s faithful student, his words would carry much weight. Therefore, Moshe prayed for Yehoshua, not for the rest.

There are three secrets to successful parenting. Pray, Pray and Pray. Of course, there are parenting techniques, and they are important. However, when things get out of hand, beyond their control, all parents can do is pray to G-d to watch over their child. Raising stable children is much more difficult today than it was even 15 years ago. Ask parents who have large families, and they will tell you of staggering tests and trials that faced the younger children, but were non-existent in the days of the older ones. Our future and the future of our children is in G-d’s hands. We need Him. We need Him to watch over us, so we need to pray.

If we pray for a successful marriage, we have a better chance at having one. Just by being aware of our shortcomings, we can work on them; but we need G-d’s help to overcome our negative habits and weaknesses. If we are committed, and if we pray, then the chance of divorce will decrease significantly.

Sefirah. He pulled a disc out of his car, a CD of R Shalom Arush. The name of the disc was, Stop Complaining. תפסיק להתבכיין. My friend told me that he had listened to this disc more than 5 times.



And it has helped him tremendously. In this disc, R Arush asks a question. But, he precedes with a fact. The fact is, the Torah is not a story book. The Torah is a way to live. And we need to take each Dvar Torah and ask ourselves how it can affect me, personally. I liked this introduction, because that is why I started Thinkingaboutme. Because I believed that all the answers to the questions of life, all the self-help tools of the gentiles, are to be found in the Torah, on a deeper, and truer level. We just need to pay attention to them, to apply them and appreciate them.

In this week's parasha, the Jews got the worst punishment ever. Until today, we are suffering from it. During forty years, the whole nation from age 20 up, died on Tisha B'av because of their having spoken in a derogatory manner about Eretz Yisrael, for their having cried over their situation. And, until today, we still suffer from this Tisha B'av mistake, ourselves. Why were the Jews punished so severely just for crying about their situation, or just for speaking negatively about Eretz Yisrael? How could it be that just for crying about their situation, the Jews were punished more severely than they were for serving the Golden Calf at Har Sinai!?!?

The answer R' Arush gives is a life-changer. He says that when a person cries about his situation, he is doing the worst thing possible. Hashem gives you so much; did you thank Him for what you have, as much as you cry for what you don't? Why do you believe that you are so deserving? Who are you, anyway? Just because others have something and you don't, does that mean that you were not dealt with fairly? This is the root of all sin, as we say in Tachanun, ולא שוה לנו, that we regret feeling that life is not fair. According to R Natan of Breslov, the reason why we are still in Galut, on a public level and on a personal level, is because we never fixed this root of negativity that we have about life. And it won't be fixed, says R Arush, until we take out half an hour a day, and do Hitbodedut, to meditate on thanking G-d for all the things that he has given us. Only when we learn to

be, to really be, appreciative, will we have a real Geulah.

I said to myself, "I feel that I, myself, am not appreciative of all that G-d gives me and does for me. You know what? Let me try that Hitbodedut thing." And so, I went to the Jerusalem forest, for a half hour. No cars, no people. I looked at my watch, to make sure I was doing my full half hour of meditation, as prescribed by R Arush. I sat alone, with G-d. I said, Thank You, Hashem for giving me... Thank You Hashem for giving me... I waited for any thoughts that were not about thanking G-d to pass. And then, got back to thanking Hashem. Thank You Hashem for giving me...

I felt more serene than I have felt in months. I looked at my watch. Only 7 minutes have passed. *What !?!?* I started looking around. Maybe someone is coming, and they will think I am Breslov? I suddenly realized that there were mosquitos that wanted to join me in Hitbodedut. I felt uncomfortable. But that experience was a powerful one. I did not want to totally give up R' Arush's advice. Instead of *sitting* in the forest, I would walk through the forest and thank G-d for what he has given me. I found that this is one of the greatest stress- relievers I have at my disposal, in my arsenal. *Connecting* with G-d.

Then, I realized that there are other things that I could meditate on that could help me be a better me. I realized that I could meditate on all the things that I was wrong about. Most people would rather die than admit they were wrong about something. But to admit to myself, is a lot easier than admitting to other people. This is another thing we are trained to do in Tachanun: to get used to saying, everyday, I was wrong. So, I decided to give up all the excess baggage – all those fears that turned out to be nothing, all the assumptions I had, all the unrealistic expectations. The silly belief that I am in charge. The ridiculous belief that I have to do more, to be more. I started to realize that admitting openly to myself where I was wrong calm me to a new level. Because one of the biggest reasons that we keep on doing wrong things in life



is that we have done those things for such a long, long, time, without admitting to ourselves how wrong they were. We continue to support our old beliefs, for the sole reason that we naturally don't want to admit we were wrong. For this reason, the Yetzer Hara has such a strong hold on us, because he was with us 13 years before the Yetzer Tov. Just admitting I was wrong separates the Yetzer Hara from us, so that we can deal with him more effectively.

Another meditation I had on one of my walks was about all the greatest things that could be in my

### EMOTION C3

A woman that one of my family members knows had three children. All girls. The woman was a bit bubbly, and when she was on her fourth pregnancy, she would tell her friends and acquaintances in a laughing manner, "If this child is also a girl, I will leave her in the hospital."

After her due date, she walked around with a smaller tummy, a worried look on her face, and no stroller. She would cry when she met friends. Then, she suddenly poured out her heart."The baby turned out to be Down Syndrome. I do not have the energy to deal with a Down Syndrome child. I left the baby in the hospital. I have just a week left to decide what I am going to do with the baby, and I cannot make up my mind." A month later, she ended up taking her daughter home, and that baby brought a lot of happiness to the family. Although her words came true at first, thank G-d the story ended happily.

In another shocking story of a couple that had been childless for many years, the wife had additional suffering, because she knew that her mother-in-law suspected that she, the wife, was to blame for their problem. More than once, when crying out in pain to her husband, she told him that it would be worth it to her to become pregnant and lose the child just to prove her mother in law that she was not the cause of their childlessness. After ten years, she finally got pregnant. And in her ninth month, she lost the child.

life. All the great things that I could change, that I could achieve, and that I could be, and how I would feel if I became the "Me" I wanted to become. This one activity, going for walks, and meditating on a single, positive pathway of thinking, helped me deal with and overcome things I was never able to deal with before. And most importantly, it brought me closer to My Creator.

It is amazing how one single Dvar Torah, if you live it, can change your life. And bring you a real, personal Geulah.

There is a Jewish concept that the Midrash teaches us in this week's Parasha called *אל יפתח אדם את פיו לשטן*. This means that when a person says that something bad will happen, he finalizes the verdict for his own misdeeds. We all have emotions that are many times irrational. But this does not mean we can say whatever we feel. As a matter of fact, the way we speak, the words we use, *define* how we feel.

After forty days, the Spies came back to the camp with a bad report. Each spy went home that night and went straight to the corner of his bedroom. Seeing the head of the family doubled up in pain, the son, daughter and daughter-in-law came over to the Spy, asking what was wrong. The Spy said, *I am so afraid for your lives! Those Emorai are so big and frightening, one could drop dead from just looking at their faces!* With that, the family burst out into tears. Then, the neighbors heard, and they also started to cry. Each Spy played this act, convulsing in fear and tears, in the corner of his room. This got his own family to cry, and the Spies spread this fear in such a way that the whole nation, even the righteous, cried through that fateful, Tisha B'Av night. (Midrash Yelamdenu)

They said, "If only we could die in the desert", or "We could have died in Egypt; that would have been better than dying at war." And because they said, *לו מתנו לו מתנו*, (Bamidbar 14 2) if only we could die, twice, G-d decreed death on them. All that generation of the desert, from the age, 20 – 60,



would die twice. במדבר הזה יתמו ושם ימותו (Bamidbar 14 35) They would die in this world on the Tisha B'Av when they were 60 years of age, and they lost the merit to enter the World to Come, as well. This is the power of אל תפתה פה לשטן.

But note this. Why did they speak in such a way? Because of an emotion. They were afraid. In spite of that, even though one is overcome by a certain emotion, one must take caution in what he says. ברית כרותה לשפתיים. You are responsible for what leaves your lips.

Another lesson we can learn here is that emotions are C3 . Contagious. Confusing. Controlling. Yawning is the expression of tiredness, an emotion(,as people *feel* tired). When you see someone yawn, you might yawn as well. If you hear a comedian cracking jokes, you will laugh much harder if people laughing in the background. Contagious emotion is the generator of angry mobs. It is what gives sports stadiums their vitality.

Emotions are Confusing. I have helped people who suffer from anxiety, worries and fears by clarifying things. If you tell someone who is worried, "Stop worrying", they can't. They have told that to themselves enough times. It did not work. And it won't work. Because to fight emotions, you need to know the thought that caused them. These are the questions that I have found effective. "What is the worst thing that could happen?" "What would be so bad about that?" "What can you do to prevent that from happening?" "What is the percentage/probability that your worst fears will be realized?" I had a study partner that was newlywed, and nervous. He could not get any sleep. I asked him what he was thinking about in bed. He responded that he gets up all night long to check and see if his newborn daughter is alright. "What are you afraid of?" "Crib death."

I asked him, "What are the statistics? How often does crib death happen?" He said, "There is a five percent chance." "Think about it: is it really an immediate or serious threat to your baby? Do you know anyone, in your entire community that lost a child because of crib death?" "No". "So, then

what is the percentage?" "Maybe one in a few thousands." "Are you calmer now?" "Yes." "Now, what can you do to prevent crib death?" He did not know. He then said he can research this and be in a better position to take preventive measures. Now he sleeps like a log. When you know how to clarify the confusion, the emotion dissipates.

Emotions are Controlling. When you want to persuade someone, talking sense is not what does it. Talking to the emotion does. When the Spies intended to convince the Jews that it was not in their best interest to go up and conquer the Land, they did not speak to their minds. Rather, they spoke to the heart. First, they expressed their fears, and, only then did they tell their lie.

It is far more persuasive and influential to talk with your body, than with your mouth. If you want to control a classroom, become aware of your students' emotions: are they looking for warmth or aloofness, a structured lesson or a relaxed one?. Fun or seriousness. Feel the pulse of the classroom, and work with it.

So, the Jews in the desert were afraid. *What is the worst that can happen?* Die at war. So, why did they say they would rather die in the desert, of starvation, or in Egypt, from the harshness of slavery? Because when a person is afraid, he just freezes and does not think logically.

*What are the chances that they would die at war?* Well, that depends on whom they are relying. Relying on themselves, there was little chance of coming out alive. But, if they would rely on the same G-d who brought the Plagues on Egypt, split the Sea, and performed so many other miracles in the desert, winning the Emori would be a cinch! But they did not want to rely on G-d; an irrational thought. They did not want to rely on His Mannah. They would rather serve an idol. נתנה ראש , the Midrash says( Otiot D R' Akiva), that they would rather serve idols, than serve a G-d that they needed to rely on. They wanted to win the war on their own, for they wanted to feel that they were a strong Nation. They would rather die, than live a life of dependence.



With all this confusion, they were still responsible for what they said.

## PARANOIA

When baseless or excessive suspicion of the motives of others displaces rational thinking and evaluation, we call it paranoia. One who looks beyond (*para*) the surface of others' actions, and suspects a scheme or plot against him, is considered to be paranoid. Although paranoia is a condition that may require clinical treatment, it also affects healthy people to one degree or another. Few people notice that they have someone in their life towards whom they feel paranoid – baselessly accusing him or her despite the other's pure intentions. It might be a child or student with a paranoid view of a parent or teacher. It might be employees or competitors with a paranoid view of one another. I asked a number of older people if they ever felt paranoid or if anyone (without real psychological problems) ever felt paranoid towards them. They all answered in the affirmative. Needless to say, they all mentioned that they endured much emotional stress as long as it was going on.

Paranoid feelings often result from a lack of self-esteem or sense of self-worth. Especially in the emotional context of family or other relationships, perceived lack of appreciation, respect, or love can cause paranoia to surface. Thus, strengthening the self-esteem of the person suffering from paranoia can help in dissipating his fear of the person he thinks is threatening him. But treating self-esteem alone is problematic because it is a drawn-out process and because it cannot fully relieve the misery and pitfalls of paranoia. If we look closely at the parashah, however, we can find an insight that can go a long way towards successfully treating this condition.

On his very last day, Moshe Rabbeinu rebuked the Jewish People for their wrongdoings during their forty years in the desert. Notice the interesting terminology he uses in regard to the national response to the incident of the spies: ותרגנו באהליכם ותאמרו בשנאת ה' אתנו הוציאנו מארץ מצרים לתת אתנו ביד האמרי להשמידנו.

*You complained in your tents and said: G-d redeemed us from Egypt out of hatred – to put us in the hands of the Emorites to destroy us.* (Devarim 1:27)

The Chafetz Chaim (שער התבונה פ' טז) connects the word ותרגנו (you complained) to נרגנות, which is essentially paranoia. When the Jews in the desert complained that all G-d had done for them was out of a desire to destroy them, this is nothing less than paranoia. The Chafetz Chaim writes on this concept concerning gossipers. One who suffers from paranoia will constantly transgress the stringent prohibition of לשון הרע (speaking ill of others). Since he will always feel that the other person is out to get him, he will have no emotional rest until he sets the imaginary score straight. The Chafetz Chaim lists another seven violations transgressed or nearly transgressed by the paranoid: ואהבת לרעך כמוך (loving your neighbor as yourself), לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך (not hating your brother in your heart), בצדק תשפוט עמיתך (judging others favorably), חושד בכשרים (suspecting an innocent person of wrongdoing), אונאת דברים (using hurtful words), הלבנת פנים (embarrassing others), מחלוקת (causing dispute).

In Moshe's description, we can also see the characteristic way in which one who is paranoid expresses his paranoia: You complained in your tents. Paranoia is often found in a relationship where there is no open discussion. The person who feels he is the victim limits his complaints to the privacy of his own home.

From here, we can derive an important lesson about how to overcome the baseless fear of the other person and his actions. Just by being open and putting the cards on the table, much of the paranoia will dissipate. If the Jews would have communicated with G-d by means of prayer or by having Moshe Rabbeinu take counsel with G-d, the calamity would have been averted. The most effective way to deal with the problem is to be open about it. If not, the most irrational thoughts –



such as G-d taking us out of Egypt to have us the greatest of minds.  
demolished by the Canaanites – can overcome even

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