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The Color of Tzitzis

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

There is a small, yet growing subfield within psychology called color psychology. Researchers in this field are interested in how people perceive, relate to, and respond differently to various colors. Some reactions that we have to colors may be based on biology. For instance, since blood rushes to the face when one becomes aggressive, the color red, in both humans and animals, is a signal of dominance. Other reactions to colors may be based on a learned association between the color and another object. For instance, a Yankee fan may feel happy when seeing blue pinstripes because he or she associates that color scheme with the team.

Towards the end of Parshat Shelach we are informed of the mitzvah of tzitzit. We are commanded to place fringes on our garments, including a thread that is tekhelet. The purpose of doing so is stated explicitly within the pesukim, as they function to remind us of G-d's commandments and not to wander after our hearts and eyes. Later authorities debate the exact color of tekhelet. Some say it is blue, some violet, and some green. Others debate how many strings have to be tekhelet and how many are to be white.

How exactly does wearing fringed garments remind us of the mitzvot and prevent us from wandering after our hearts and eyes? Numerous explanations have been given, some focusing on number symbolism, others on the significance of garments, and still others on the importance of color. Focusing for now on this last category, the question becomes more specific: how does wearing blue/violet/green strings interspersed through white strings, remind us not to sin?

Rabbi Meir (Menachot 43b) tells us that looking at tekhelet sets off a string of associations that keeps us from sinning. Tekhelet, which he seems to understand as being blue, is a similar color to the ocean, which is a similar color to the sky, which is a similar color to G-d's Throne of Glory.

Ramban adds that within the word tekhelet are the words *kol* (all) and *tachlit* (purpose). Meaning at its core tekhelet reminds us of our mission in this world, which is to serve G-d by doing mitzvot and avoid sinning.

Writing in the 15th century, Rabbi Isaac Arama suggests that there is another important moral significance embedded within tekhelet. The message is dependent on a medieval color theory which is not followed in modern times. The assumption was that there were seven colors that flowed on a spectrum: white, yellow, red, green, blue, purple and black. At the extremes of the spectrum were white and black, and sitting in the middle was green. Rabbi Arama, presumably understanding that tekhelet is green, argues that the symbolism behind tekhelet is that it is the middle ground between extremes. This serves as a model for our character traits that we should follow the middle path.

Using Rabbi Arama's precedent to interpret the message of tekhelet based on the color science of his time, perhaps there is another layer to tekhelet that we can add by viewing it through the prism of modern color psychology. In a fascinating article researching how colors impact marketing strategy, Lauren Labrecque and George Milne summarize previous findings as to the psychological significance of different colors. White, the total reflection of all of the colors, is associated with sincerity, purity, and peace. Blue, which along with violet represent the shortest wavelength of all of the colors, is associated with intelligence, trust, and duty. In contrast, colors on the longer end of the wavelength spectrum (like red, orange, and yellow) stimulate states of excitement and arousal, oftentimes emotions related to sin.

As the pesukim indicate, tzitzit function to counteract sin. Presupposing that tekhelet is blue, perhaps the duty and loyalty invoked by seeing blue and the purity associated with white, are meant as a counter to calm the

excitement represented by the red of sin. In addition to the associations that lead to us to think of G-d's throne, the psychological symbolism of the colors themselves may

The Panic Button

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Moshe launches a reconnaissance mission and expects honest reporting. We can't possibly conquer this hotly contested country without accurate intel and without truthful information. Yet the story of "the spies" represents the lowest point in Moshe's career and of the desert saga. What was so notorious about this incident? Why did it torpedo the march toward the promised land, reroute the Jews for an additional 38 desert-years, and reshape the arc of Jewish history?

Our Chazal identified the essential failure of the spies and the mob they foment. G-d asserts that this day – the 9th of Av – the day the Jews whined needlessly (*bechayah shel chinam*) – would be converted into a perennial day of tragedy. Evidently, it was the pointlessness of their whimpering which was so troubling and implicating.

Moshe had dispatched agents to gather hard facts and their discoveries did indeed warrant reassessment, precaution and the adopting of new military tactics. It also required a boosting of faith in recognition that this war would be waged supernaturally and not purely through military might and political clout. Adjustments, prayers, and safeguards would all have been appropriate in light of the new facts which surfaced.

However, these findings do not justify the wide-scale panic and fright which spooks an entire nation. Life commonly presents adversity and seemingly insurmountable challenges and the acquisition of the land Israel is no different. However, these trials demand calm reactions but not panic and dread. Repeatedly, the responses – both of the actual spies as well as the riled-up populace – are driven by fear and anxiety rather than resolute confrontation of future challenges.

At least three examples of panic-driven comments are recorded:

1. Irrational Fears: "A Land which Devours its Inhabitants"

It is one thing to fear the military might of the local chieftains. Similarly, concerns about impregnable walls and hilly landscapes are all warranted. However, it is ridiculous

serve as an intervention to arrest the arousal of sin and remind us to be loyal to G-d.

to assume that a particular region or a particular climate is toxic or deadly. This type of irrational fear would be foolish for anyone but is even more bizarre for a nation which had survived a year of lethal plagues in Egypt and had thrived for over a year under extreme desert conditions. Life may indeed be more rugged in this land of giants and of outsized fruit, but it is ludicrous to imagine a land actually infecting its inhabitants. In our panic our reason is distorted, our judgement clouded and we are hypnotized us into irrational beliefs.

2. Inaccurate Estimation of Others: "They viewed us as grasshoppers"!

The spies felt dwarfed by the local giants and they envisioned themselves as tiny grasshoppers. This feeling of intimidation is understandable and legitimate, but their ensuing comments aren't: "... and the locals viewed us this way [as grasshoppers] as well"!! How could the spies determine how they were being viewed by the locals? In fact, forty years later, Rachav, the woman living in the city gates, reports that the entire indigenous population was terrified by the Jewish nation who had traversed the oceans; evidently the locals were more frightened by these "grasshoppers" than the spies could ever imagine. Overwhelmed by dread, we often agonize or obsess over how we are viewed by others and this very preoccupation can itself be crippling. In this situation, the spies aren't only consumed with how they are viewed by others. They project their own fears into the mindset of these "giants" and assume that their own profiles as midgets was shared by the locals. Unhealthy panic causes us to obsess over how we are viewed and, additionally, causes us to stream our own self-image into the hearts and imaginations of others. Panic skews our perceptions and blurs our clear thinking.

3. Projection of our own flaws

Humans have a difficult time acknowledging their own flaws and faults. One 'easy' coping mechanism is to "project" these flaws onto others, thereby allowing us to face them "more easily". Though we constantly project, when we panic, the process sometimes becomes

preposterous. Parshat Devarim mentions the mob's accusation of G-d: "Because G-d despises us, He emancipated us from Egypt only to slaughter us in the desert". While there could be many 'motives' for the Divine plan, it is delusional to imagine all this effort, all the liberation, miracles, see-splitting, desert protection, Torah delivery and constant pardoning, simply as Divine manipulation. How did they imagine that all this effort was driven by presumed Divine hatred? Rashi reveals the root of this absurd comment: G-d didn't hate them but, in reality, these protestors hated G-d. The dissenters were projecting their own hatred for G-d, upon G-d! This laughable projection is direct and tragic consequence of uncontrollable panic. Panic lays bare fears and flaws and we cope by projecting these shortcomings upon those closest to us.

Our parsha highlights the devastating impact of panicked behavior. Had their response been more professional and more steady, their reports would have been invaluable and the consequent adjustments would have been appropriate. Of course, panic isn't just a moral flaw or a hazard to healthy decision making. It is a fundamental deficiency of faith in G-d. Faith should never render us passive or ignorant of practical concerns. However, abject dread and panic ignores G-d's role and eliminates destiny from the equation. Pragmatism, practical measures and precautions are all synchronous with faith- panic is not and this parsha highlights the corrosive effect of panic. This panicky and pointless whining condemned this day as one of actual tears for real

A Doomed Plan

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsberg

Sadly, the Torah portion of Shelach is dominated by the sin of the spies, and the eventual repercussions that ensued. This period of time was an indelible stain on the identity of the Jewish people. Even today, when commemorating the destruction of the Temples on the Ninth of Av, we recall as well on that day the decree handed down to the generation of Jews who exited Egypt received the Torah. Upon receiving this decree, where they would die in the wilderness, we are witness to an unexpected reaction by the Jewish people, followed by a plan doomed to fail.

After hearing the decree, the initial reaction seemed

tragedies which would far exceed this mini-crisis.

AFTERWORD:

During the summer of 2014 we experienced the tragedy of the horrific kidnapping and subsequent murder of the 3 High School boys in Gush Etzion. A well-known Rabbi accused the parents of these boys as partially guilty for this crime. Their choice to educate their children in Gush Etzion- a dangerous area – was responsible for this tragedy. You can imagine the public and justifiable outcry against this very insensitive and theologically troubling statement. I recorded a response which was entitled "Why I agree with this Rabbi's statement". I fundamentally agreed that parents have a primary responsibility to provide for the safety and security of their children. I compared the statistics of non-natural deaths of adolescent males in Gush Etzion that summer versus the number of non-natural deaths in the home district in the USA of that Rabbi. Accounting for crime, drug-related and vehicular deaths the numbers were lopsided- it was far more dangerous to live in that USA community in the summer of 2014 than it was in Gush Etzion. That Rabbi had a parental responsibility to relocate his children to the safer environment in the Gush.

Terror is primarily a psychological weapon and it must be confronted psychologically. Of course, we must always implement precautionary safety measures to insure maximal security. However, if our panic frightens us into paralysis or retreat, we have awarded terror its victory. By doing so we have also exposed glaring deficiencies in our faith.

appropriate (Bamidbar 14:39):

"Moses related all these words to the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly"

It would appear this was a pivotal moment, as the opportunity to repent was there for the taking. The Torah continues (ibid 40):

"They arose early in the morning and ascended to the mountain top, saying, 'We are ready to go up to the place of which the Lord spoke, for we have sinned.'"

It is important to note that they waited until morning, an indication that this was not simply a purely emotional reaction to God's decree. There was some thought

involved, and a seemingly sincere admission of sin, in their desire to enter Israel at that moment. Moshe, though, responds that this plan cannot succeed. God would not be with them, as they had “turned away from Hashem”. What was the response from those involved in this plan? (ibid 44)

“They defiantly (vayapilu) ascended to the mountain top, but the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord and Moses did not move from the camp.”

Their plan failed, many were killed, and the Torah moves on.

The Torah’s detailed description of the sin of the spies allows us to analyze and internalize, creating an awareness of that which causes a breach in the relationship between God and the Jewish people. The same must be said about this final sin, the overt disobedience against the strict command of God. Why did they do it?

The turning point of the story lies in the use of “vayapilu”, as noted by Rashi (ibid):

“a term connoting insolence; similarly (Hab. 2:4), “behold, it is insolent,” in old French, engres, a term denoting arrogant boldness... The Midrash Tanchuma (Buber Shelach addendum 19) interprets it as a term denoting darkness; they [the Israelites] went in darkness, without permission.”

Rashi offers two overall interpretations of this word. The first demonstrates the attitude of the people. However, the one from the Midrash does not seem to make much sense at first glance. What is the darkness being spoke of here? How is this tied to their lack of permission?

One would think that upon hearing the horrible news of the decree, at the very least the people would engage in the process of repentance. Indeed, the Torah seems to explicitly endorse this assumption. However, when we look at the order of the verse, there is a hint as to the lack of complete repentance. Rather than the verse begin with the admission of sin, followed by the desire to enter into the Land of Israel, the plan to enter comes first. Their focus seemed to be solely on executing the plan, the issue of repentance relegated to a secondary position. What then was their plan and their motivation? It could be the people involved in this attempt were not at first overtly challenging God’s decree. They recognized the horrific nature of their sin. They also assumed that repentance should bring about a change in God’s plan. After all, one of the hallmarks of God’s mercy, as exhibited through forgiveness (kapara), is the changing of a verdict. These people expected that

the decree would naturally be overturned through their repentance. They acted based on this supposition, refusing to believe that there are some sins that are so heinous, God will not change His decree. Their repentance hinged on the belief that it would bring about a reversal of said decree; therefore, the admission of sin follows the formulation of the plan.

Moshe confronts them head on, challenging their assumption. God would not be with them, they would fail, and their plan was a mistake. Moshe was giving them a clear warning, ensuring that their next step would be one based on all the facts, so to speak. When faced with the path of heeding Moshe’s warning versus going ahead with their plan, they chose the hopeless path. It is this demonstration of arrogance that lies at the heart of Rashi’s first explanation. The curtain was pulled back, so to speak, and the emotion driving them was now on full display.

However, it is Rashi’s second explanation that requires a deeper understanding. The sin being committed here was, ironically, the reverse of the attitude they first exhibited at the time of the spies. When faced with the challenge presented by the spies, where the “odds” of the Jewish people being able to enter and conquer the Land of Israel seemed daunting, they recoiled. There was no way they could succeed. Their security in God was in fact an illusion. They were destined to die if they entered under God’s conditions. Now, when faced with the decree, and Moshe’s subsequent denial of their aspirations, they resolved that they would succeed without God at all. They could pull off the conquering of the Land of Israel, summoning some underlying courage. Sadly, their arrogance blinded them to the reality. The ability of the Jewish people to succeed in their future entering the Land of Israel would be based on Divine Providence. Without God’s assistance and guidance, there was no chance they could succeed. This is the darkness being referred to by the Midrash. They sought to use the natural world in fulfilling this plan, thinking they could succeed. In fact, without God’s assistance, they were wandering in the dark, unable to realize the reality that the only chance of success lie with God. In many ways, the plan of the Jewish people here was in fact the final step in the sin started with the report of the spies. There was a resistance in placing their security in God, and their refusal ultimately led to the tragic results.

The Women Who Loved the Land

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Pinchas, we read of the Bnos Tzelafchad, the five daughters of Tzelafchad - Machlah, Noah, Choglah, Milkah and Tirtzah - who approached Moshe with a unique and unusual request. Our father died in the desert... and he did not have sons. Why should the name of our father be omitted from among his family because he had no son? תָּנֶה-לָּנוּ אֲחִיָּהּ, - בתוך אחי אבינו - Give us a possession (of the Land) among our father's brothers (Bamidbar 27:1-4).

And Moshe brought their query before Hashem, and Hashem said: כֵּן, בְּנוֹת צִלְפָּחַד דְּבַרְתֶּי--נָתַן תִּתֵּן לָהֶם אֲחֵזָה נָחֳלָה, - The daughters of Tzelafchad speak properly. You shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among the brothers of their father, and you shall cause the inheritance of their father to pass over to them (ibid, v.7).

Moreover, as the book of Bamidbar closes, and the final parsha - Masei - is read, we once again are reminded of the story of the daughters of Tzelafchad (Bamidbar 36). As we close the book of "Bamidbar - In The Desert" the final lingering lesson is: this is not your place, keep your eyes facing forward, and your feet marching towards, the final and ultimate destination. You are currently In The Desert, but the goal is The Holy Land, for which the daughters of Tzelafchad yearned.

Unlike the spies and the generation who rejected the land (Bamidbar 13-14), the daughters of Tzelafchad embraced the land. As Moshe prepared to send the spies, thirty-eight years prior to the request of the daughters of Tzelafchad, the pasuk (verse) says: שְׁלַח-לָךְ אֲנָשִׁים, וְיֵתְרוּ - And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Send forth for yourself men, and let them spy out the Land of Canaan that I give to the Children of Israel; one man each from his fathers' tribe shall you send, every one a leader among them (Bamidbar 13:1-2).

On the above verse, the Kli Yakar (d.1619, Prague), connects the sin of the spies with the story of the daughters of Tzelafchad, and fascinatingly comments:

ד"א לכך פרט אנשים, לפי שארז"ל (ילקו"ש פנחס תשעג כז) האנשים היו שונאים את הארץ, ואמרו נתנה ראש ונשובה מצרימה (במדבר יד ד) והנשים היו מחבבות הארץ ואמרו תנה לנו אחזה (שם כז ד). וע"כ אמר הקב"ה, לפי דעתי שאני רואה בעתיד, היה יותר טוב לשלוח נשים המחבבות את הארץ, כי לא יספרו בגנותה, אבל

לך לדעתך שאתה סבור שכשרים המה, ואתה סבור שהארץ חביבה עליהם תשלח אנשים. וזהו שלח לך לדעתך אנשים, אבל לדעתי היה יותר טוב לשלוח נשים כאמור

And another reason that the verse says (when G-d spoke to Moshe, in regard to the mission of the spies) send for yourself men: Because the Sages say, the men hated the land and they said, "let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt (Bamidbar 14:4)" and the women loved the land, and they said "give us a portion (of the land) (ibid 27:4)." Therefore, Hashem said to Moshe: according to My opinion - what I see in the future, it would be better to send women (as the scouts to investigate the Land), who love and desire the land, because they will not speak disparagingly of the land. But for you, according to your opinion, Moshe, you are sure that these men are righteous and upstanding, and you are sure that the land is beloved to them, send for yourself men. And that is why it says, - שְׁלַח-לָךְ אֲנָשִׁים - Send for yourself, according to your opinion, men. But according to My opinion, it would be better to send women...

What an incredible pshat (explanation)! The women of that generation, represented by the daughters of Tzelafchad, desired the land, loved the land and embraced the land. Hence - give us a portion, even though our father had no son. And to their request, Hashem replied: כֵּן, בְּנוֹת צִלְפָּחַד דְּבַרְתֶּי.

Compelling to consider the lashon (language) of the verse - כֵּן, בְּנוֹת צִלְפָּחַד דְּבַרְתֶּי. The daughters of Tzelafchad have spoken properly and well. Whereas the spies spoke slander regarding the Land: אָשֶׁר תָּרוּ אֵתָהּ - they (the spies) brought forth an evil report on the land that they had spied out (Bamidbar 13:32); the daughters of Tzelafchad spoke positively and well. For this, they were beautifully rewarded as their request was heard and accepted.

Miriam Peretz writes, "My sons wanted to serve in the IDF. They wanted it to be a service of life. They didn't want to die. They viewed military service as a mitzvah and a privilege, not an obligation... They saw their father working as a volunteer to establish the Beit Knesset in Givat Ze'ev. They saw me, a religious mother, sending her children to study in religious schools, but choosing to serve as principal of a special secular school in which pupils

explore their identity and are connected to their homeland and their roots... We educated our children to love this land and our country, our people with all its different kinds of individuals, and our splendid Jewish heritage.

"I didn't think I could be an example of love of country to them, because for many years I have felt that I hadn't done enough for my country. What had I done, after all? I didn't dry any swamps or pave any roads. I hadn't even served in the army. I made aliyah to something ready-made, a country already built and developed.

"Today I have no such pangs of conscience. I gave, twice. I paid the price of our existence here, I paid my debt to the state. Despite all the sorrow, pain and longing, I

know this was the most appropriate death for my sons. If I could wake them up for just a moment and ask, I have no doubt that each of them would say that he was willing to give his life again, so that children in the north and south could sleep safely, play on the playground, and enjoy a peaceful life..." (Miriam's Song, p.319-320).

As we prepare for the bitter and painful day of Tisha B'Av, when our forefathers rejected the Holy Land, let us hope and pray that our longing, love, appreciation, and positivity for The Land of Israel and for Am Yisrael will be enough to merit us the ultimate redemption, may it be immediate and in our days, amen!

Of Two Stonings

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh of those who had scouted the land, rent their clothes and exhorted the whole Israelite community: "The land that we traversed and scouted is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord is pleased with us, He will bring us into that land, a land that flows with milk and honey, and give it to us; only you must not rebel against the Lord... As the whole community threatened to pelt them with stones, the Presence of the Lord appeared in the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites." (Bamidbar 14:6-10, JPS trans.)

As the Jews' fear grew after the report of the spies, their reactions became increasingly frenzied. What started as fear became rebellion, and then an attempt to return to Egypt, and culminated with an attempted stoning.

Most commentaries (Rashi, Ibn Ezra) contend that the Jews' targets were Kalev and Yehoshua. Their desire to silence opposition brought them to attempted murder. Several midrashim (Bamidbar Rabah, Mechilta) argue that it was Moshe and Aharon who the Jews wanted to kill. They wanted to take their anger out on the leaders responsible for taking them out of Egypt and into the desert.

For both of these interpretations, the subsequent appearance of G-d's presence was as an act of protection. At one level, as Netziv (Haamek Davar) understands it, G-d's presence scared the Jews into desisting from their violent reprisals. The Mechilta D'Rabbi Yishmael, on the other hand, claims that it did not stop the Jews – it merely

protected their potential victims: "Better that the pillar of cloud be struck than that Moshe and Aharon be stoned!"

The Talmud (Sotah 35a) takes a radical approach. G-d's presence did not appear to protect the victims – G-d Himself was the target! "Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba says: This teaches that they took stones and threw them upward as if to throw them at G-d."

In light of this, the end of Parshat Shelach is striking. There again we find the Jews stoning a person, this time successfully. After finding a person violating Shabbat by gathering wood, the Jews bring him to Moshe. After consultation with G-d, they execute him by stoning, as G-d commands. Why is this unit here?

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch claims this story indicates that the Jews had achieved a level of repentance. Although they had been sentenced to death, they did not give up on G-d. Though they were on "death row", they committed to following the Torah as they wandered through the desert. The same Jews who not long ago had attempted to kill those who represented the truth (Kalev and Yehoshua), or their Divinely appointed leaders (Moshe and Aharon), or even wanted to stone G-d Himself, now turned their energies to prosecuting those who dared to violate G-d's will.

Rabbanit Sharon Rimon (<http://etzion.org.il/en/stick-gatherer>) argues that the anecdote of the "stick gatherer" is placed here to highlight this point. She notes that this story is similar to that of the "blasphemer" in many ways. In both cases, a single sinner, whose punishment

is unknown, is imprisoned while awaiting sentencing. Then, each is executed by stoning. However, in the story of the blasphemer, the criminal is the center of the story. His name is known. Here, however, the stick gatherer is nameless. The main characters in the story are the Jews who find him and bring him to justice. While the blasphemer is brought before Moshe, the stick gatherer is brought before the entirety of the Jewish people.

The story of the blasphemer prompts a discussion of the relevant laws for the future; in the story of the stick

gatherer, the focus is the one instance, and no laws are mentioned. Noting these and other details, she reaches a conclusion which builds on the ideas above. This tragic incident closes the unit of the spies to tell us that despite it all, the Jews who were destined to die in the desert still made the heroic decision to die as committed Jews.

Though this parshah may be depressing, there is comfort in this fact – that even the most rebellions of sinners can find it within themselves to renew their commitment to G-d.

Slandering a Land?

Rabbi Avraham Gordimer

Rashi's commentary on Parshas Shelach commences with the well-known words of Medrash Tanchuma: "Why does the story of the Meraglim (the Spies) appear immediately after the story of Miriam (being smitten with Tzora'as)? Because she was punished for slanderous speech against her brother (Moshe), and these evildoers (the Meraglim) witnessed it yet didn't take heed (and proceeded to speak slanderously as well)."

This explanation is at first glance extremely perplexing, for the object of the Meraglim's slander, their Lashon Ha'ra, was the Land of Israel (v. Bamidbar 14:36) – an inanimate entity, which obviously cannot be offended or harmed by Lashon Ha'ra. Had Rashi (and the Medrash) here faulted the Meraglim for their offense against Hashem, by denying His promises of a successful takeover of Eretz Yisroel, it would have been one thing, but since the Meraglim are being criticized for speaking Lashon Ha'ra regarding the Land of Israel, how are we to understand it? There is no such thing as Lashon Ha'ra against insentient lands and objects.

In order to properly grasp the words of Rashi and the Medrash, we must engage in a fresh evaluation of the sin of Lashon Ha'ra.

Lashon Ha'ra is not simply the relating of negative information; since the prohibition of Lashon Ha'ra pertains to sharing true (but uncomplimentary) information about others, there must be something deeper going on, as passing on incontrovertible facts and spreading the truth should seemingly not be problematic. What is the basis for this prohibition?

When one speaks Lashon Ha'ra, he paints the object of his speech with an overly simplistic brush, unfairly

presenting that person's actions without full context and any underlying particulars. Even assuming the person did indeed commit the wrongdoing related in the Lashon Ha'ra about him, maybe it was committed in error? Maybe it was a one-time action that the person thereupon immediately regretted and for which he did Teshuva? Maybe there were numerous other circumstances involved that would totally change the picture, were they to be known? Despite these possibilities, the Lashon Ha'ra has portrayed the person in a negative light, omitting and disregarding the innumerable unknown factors that might favorably and comprehensively change one's understanding of the actions committed. Lashon Ha'ra presents superficial, surface-level and often shallow impressions, which are conveyed and/or understood to be the total story. Critical background and behind-the-scenes context are impossible to fully know and are perforce absent.

This is precisely what the Meraglim did as well. They portrayed Eretz Yisroel from a surface-level, superficial standpoint, depicting a land that is very difficult to inhabit, nearly impossible to conquer, and extremely unwelcoming to newcomers. The fact that Eretz Yisroel would be supernaturally overtaken by the Jewish People as part of a spiritual mission assured by Hashem's promises and effectuated by His miracles was absent from the Meraglim's negative report. The Meraglim presented the narrative of Eretz Yisroel totally out of context and missing Divine involvement; they related only a limited and by definition myopic perspective, which did not contain a crucial spiritual component that would have fully negated their defeatist message.

Lashon Ha'ra is based in misapprehension and

misrepresentation, adopting the superficial appearance of matters and failing to delve deeper into the circumstances and the less detectable facets; even if the data presented is technically true, it is prone to grossly mischaracterize the object of the Lashon Ha'ra.

This would appear to be the basis of a striking statement in the Gemara (Arachin 15b): Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Yose ben Zimra: "One who speaks Lashon Ha'ra is akin to one who denies the existence of Hashem." What is the meaning of this stark declaration?

The answer would seem to be that just like the slanderer who spreads Lashon Ha'ra is only focused on the surface aspects of what occurred, not considering less visible and more profound information that could very well

present quite a different picture, such is also the posture of the nonbeliever, who looks at the physical world and cannot perceive Hashem with his five human senses, thereupon concluding that there must not be a God. Viewing the world through an extremely narrow, shallow lens will lead to denial of anything that cannot be bodily detected; this is the way of the simpleton, irrespective of his scientific degrees. Failure to consider that information may exist which is beyond our limited human perception is shortsighted and heretical, and such an approach, which only processes and conveys the external and cosmetic aspects of an event, is in truth that of the bearer of Lashon Ha'ra.

This is Lashon Ha'ra; this is the real sin of the Meraglim.

Converging Paths in Serving Hashem

Yonatan Kurz

In this week's parsha, Moshe changes יהושע's name to יהושע. Rashi explains that the name יהושע is a compound of the phrase "May ה' save you," and implies that of all the spies, משה only davened for יהושע to be saved from the advice of the מרגלים. Why was כלב not given either of these זכויות?

A מערת המכפלה says that כלב went alone to קברות of the אבות and davened that he would not be sidetracked by his fellow מרגלים to give the advice that they gave, and would remain strong to his convictions. יהושע's merit was seemingly greater than that of כלב, as the מסורה of the תורה was transferred to him straight from משה. In addition to that, he was able to be pass it down to the זקנים, and indirectly to the rest of כלל ישראל for the rest of time.

If there was such a discrepancy in merit, how did both יהושע and כלב reach the same outcome at the end of the תוספתא incident? Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel quotes a

כלב and יהושע that both דרכים which teaches that כריתות took were correct in the aspect of עבודה ה', as they each had their hearts concentrated towards שמים throughout the entire process. He says that this shows that there is no one דרך that's greater than the other; all that הקדוש ברוך הוא wants is a person who concentrates their heart to שמים and to ה'.

One of the amazing things about עם ישראל is the incredible diversity in the composition and fabric of the people. Despite the stark contrast of all the different environments that we are in during the rest of the day, everyone is able to seamlessly assemble as a collective whole, and create a transformative experience for the community. The fact that people connect and serve Hashem in such varying ways throughout the day and still are able to coexist in such harmony is truly something unique, and proves to be yet another reason why כלל ישראל is such an incredible nation.