

TorahFax: Shelach

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Monday, Sivan 23, 5783 (Hakhel Year) June 12, 2023

At the end of last week's Parsha, Beha'alotcha (which we read in the Diaspora), the Torah tells us that, "Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth."

Q. Moshe attained the highest spiritual level any human achieved or could achieve. In many ways Moshe was even greater than the angels. Moshe was the only human who was on Mount Sinai for a total of 120 days. G-d praised Moshe that he was the only person with whom G-d spoke "mouth to mouth." How can we explain rationally the fact that Moshe was the most humble person on the face of the earth? He surely knew his great qualities. How could he feel so humble?

A. There is a saying in the Talmud, "Whoever has one hundred wants two hundred; whoever has two hundred, desires four hundred, etc." The more one possesses, the more one desires. In other words, the more one has the more they feel they are missing. This is especially true with spirituality.

It is precisely for this reason that Moshe was so humble. Moshe attained the highest spiritual level and the highest level of Torah knowledge, more than any other human being. From his vantage point he realized that there was so much more beyond his reach. Thus, he felt he was missing so much more. This made him the most humble person on the face of the earth.

In many synagogues there is a sign, "Da lifnei mi ata omed" – "Know before whom you are standing." The reason for this is that prayer must be with humility. We shouldn't come before G-d saying, "You owe me. I deserve that you fulfill my requests." We should pray with humility; that G-d answer our prayers out of His infinite kindness, even though we may not be deserving. Realizing before whom we are standing in prayer helps us feel humble. The more we focus on G-d's greatness, the more we realize our own shortcomings. This helps us pray with humility.

It was the same with Moshe. His knowledge of G-d's greatness surpassed that of any other human being. Thus, he realized that with all his great virtues, he was so insignificant in the presence of G-d. As a result, he was the most humble person upon the face of the earth.

Also, Moshe felt that his qualities were a gift from G-d. It was not his achievement, only that G-d chose him to lead the Jewish people. Moshe thought, had G-d chosen anyone else for this role, they would have surpassed his accomplishments. Thus, he was the most humble person.

A poor man once came upon a tremendous treasure of the most expensive diamonds buried in the ground. Afraid of being seen, he quickly stuffed his pockets with as many diamonds as he could. When his family saw the treasure, they were all jumping with excitement... But he was very sad. When asked why he was so sad, he replied, "You're happy because this is all you see, but I know that compared to what I left behind, what I took is so insignificant. The same was with Moshe. Realizing how much was beyond him which he couldn't attain, made him feel very humble.

Tuesday, Sivan 24, 5783 (Hakhel Year) June 13, 2023

The Torah readings these weeks differ between Israel and the Diaspora. Israel is one Torah portion ahead of us. In Israel this Shabbat they will read Parshat Korach. In the Diaspora we will be reading Parshat Shlach.

Parshat Shlach begins with the story of the 12 spies that Moshe sent to scout the land of Canaan which G-d promised to give to the Jewish people. Yet, instead of returning and encouraging the people to go and conquer the land, ten of the spies brought back a negative report which discouraged the people.

They brought back enormous fruits from the land. Displaying the fruits, they told of the giants who live in the land. They concluded their report by saying, "The land through which we have passed is a land which eats up its inhabitants!"

The Jewish people were so distressed, upon hearing this, that they wanted to return back to Egypt, refusing to go into the Promised Land. G-d punished them and instead of continuing to the Promised Land they stayed in the desert for forty years, until all those who refused to go to Israel died. Only their children eventually merited to go into The Land.

Q. Why did they describe the land as, "a land which eats up its inhabitants?"

A. In order that the spies should not be harmed, G-d brought a plague wherever the spies went. Thus, the people of the land were busy burying their dead and did not pay attention to the spies. Had their faith in G-d been complete, the spies would have realized that this was for their benefit. However,

because they lacked faith in G-d's promise that the land was good, they attributed the deaths to, "a land which eats up its inhabitants!"

Q. The spies said, "And we were in our own eyes as grasshoppers and so we were in their eyes." What lesson can one derive from this?

A. Our Rabbis explain that just as a person is in his own eyes so too he is perceived by others.

Had the spies been positive and confident in their mission, remembering that they were sent by Moshe, they would have been proud of their mission. However, with their negative attitude ("we were in our own eyes as grasshoppers") they projected the same image about themselves to the inhabitants of the land; as small and meaningless creatures.

There is an important lesson here: When we do a mitzvah, performing our G-dly mission in this world, it is important to feel proud and positive about what we are doing. This feeling will then be projected and transmitted to others. They will look at us positively and they too will be influenced to do the same.

Thursday, Sivan 26, 5783 (Hakhel Year) June 15, 2023

The end of this week's Parsha (in the Diaspora), Shlach, is about the mitzvah of Tzitzit.

The Torah says, "G-d spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, they should make for them Tzitzis on the corners of their garments

throughout their generations. They should place a thread of turquoise (wool) in the tzitzit of each corner..."

The Torah relates the purpose of this mitzvah, "When you see it, you will remember all the commandments of G-d to perform them, and you will not follow after the spies; your hearts and your eyes, which lead you astray. So that you will remember and perform all My commandments and you will be holy unto your G-d. I am G-d, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be your

G-d. I am G-d your G-d."

This mitzvah is performed each day of the year when we wear the Talit during the morning prayers. Many also wear a "small Talit" all the time, to perform the mitzvah of Tzitzit all day.

This portion of the Torah is recited together with the Shema Yisrael (Hear O Israel) twice daily - during the morning service and in the evening service. It is also recited again before going to sleep at night.

Q. Why do we recite this twice a day?

A. One of the 613 commandments is to remember the Exodus from Egypt every morning and every night. By reciting this portion of the Torah, in which we say, "I am G-d, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d," we mention the Exodus and thus, fulfill the commandment.

Q. What does the Torah mean, "When you see it, you will remember all the commandments of G-d to perform them"? How does seeing the Tzitzit remind us of all the 613 mitzvot?

A. The numerical value of the Hebrew word "Tzitzit" equals; 600 ($90+10+90+10+400=600$). There are 8 strings hanging on each corner of the Talit and 5 knots, for a total of 13 ($8+5=13$). Together with the numerical value of the word Tzitzit which is 600, we have 613 – the exact number of mitzvot.

Q. What does the Torah mean, "And you will not follow after the spies; your hearts and your eyes, which lead you astray." Why are the heart and eyes called spies?

A. Our sages say that a person is introduced to sin through the eyes that see and the heart which desires a forbidden object. The spies which Moshe sent in the beginning of this week's Parsha, to spy the land, misled the people when they came back with a negative report, which resulted in their punishment. Thus, the Torah tells us the effect of looking at the Tzitzit is that we will remember the 613 mitzvot; "And you will not follow after the spies; your hearts and your eyes, which may lead you astray."

Friday, Sivan 27, 5783 (Hakhel Year) June 16, 2023

The mitzvah (commandment) of Tzitzit, is found at the end of this week's Parsha, Shlach. By wearing the Talit during the daily morning prayers we have performed this mitzvah daily for over three thousand years. The following are some points about the mitzvah of Tzitzit.

The Talit has four corners. On each of the corners we insert Tzitzit. Each of the four Tzitzit is made of four strings which are folded over, thus becoming eight. There are five knots in every tzitzah. One of the four strings is longer than the others. It is wrapped around the other strings between the knots. The number of wrappings is: 7 – 8 – 11 – 13. Thus, between the five knots there are a total of 39 wrappings.

Q. What is the significance of the thirty-nine wrappings as related to the Tzitzit?

A. The purpose of the Tzitzit is to remind us of all of G-d's mitzvot, which He commanded us. The Torah portion of Tzitzit ends with, "I am G-d your G-d." This portion is recited daily together with the portion of the Shema Israel, "Hear O Israel G-d is our G-d, G-d is One."

The numerical value of G-d's Hebrew name is 26. The numerical value of the Hebrew word ONE ("G-d is One") is 13. Just like the numerical value of Tzitzit alludes to the number 613 (as mentioned yesterday), the 39 wrappings of the longer Tzitzah string around the other strings alludes to this idea – G-d is One (26+13=39).

Q. As mentioned in yesterday's Torah Fax, many observe this mitzvah all day long by wearing a small Talit on top or under their shirt. Why do many of them have their Tzitzit hanging out?

A. This is based on the words of this Parsha concerning Tzitzit, "You will see it and you will remember all the commandments of G-d to perform them..." Thus, we leave the Tzitzit out where they can be seen all the time.

Q. Every morning, (except on Shabbat and Yom Tov when we don't wear Tefillin), when we pray with the Talit and Tefillin, we put on the Talit first then the Tefillin. Why do we put on the Talit first?

A. The general rule is that when we have to perform two mitzvot at the same time, the one which is more regular comes first. It is the same reasoning here. The Talit we put on every day of the year, Shabbat and holidays included. The Tefillin we do not wear on Shabbat and holidays. Thus, the Talit is a more regularly performed mitzvah and thus is put on first.

Q. What is the meaning of the word, "Tzitzit"?

A. One explanation by Rashi is that "Tzitzit" comes from the word, "Maytzitz," which means, "to see." Because seeing the strings of the Tzitzit reminds us of all the mitzvot, they are called Tzitzit – to see.