

# INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Yisroal ben Aryeh Lieb, HaLevi.  
"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS SHELACH

## My Wish is My Command

*They awoke early in the morning and ascended toward the mountaintop saying, "We are ready, we shall go up to the place of which Hashem has spoken – we have sinned" (14:40).*

This week's *parsha* recounts the tragic story of the twelve spies who led to the death of an entire generation and left Bnei Yisroel wandering in the desert for forty years. An oft overlooked postscript to this calamitous story is that of the "Mapilim." In summary: The morning after the terrible decree that the entire generation would perish in the desert and not enter Eretz Yisroel, a large group decided that they would show Hashem that really desired to enter Eretz Yisroel. They said, "We are ready, we shall go up to the place of which Hashem has spoken – we have sinned."

Upon hearing their plans, Moshe told them explicitly, "Do not ascend, it will not succeed. Do not ascend, for Hashem is not in your midst [...] You have turned away from Hashem and Hashem will not be with you" (14:41-43). Of course, the people were intransigent and attempted to go up to Eretz Yisroel anyway. Just as Moshe had predicted, they were wiped out by the Amalekites and Cananites who dwelled on the mountain.

Bal Shemtov wonders why their admission, "we have sinned," isn't considered *teshuvah* – repentance. In other words, why were they punished so severely? They seemingly accepted responsibility for their actions, why didn't Hashem accept their contrition and allow them to enter the land?

There is a fundamental misunderstanding of what Bnei Yisroel's transgression was in the episode of the spies. It is commonly understood that they were punished for not trusting in Hashem and believing that the land He was taking them to was truly a wonderful place. While it is true that it was wrong not to trust Hashem, this trust was violated merely by sending the spies. In other words, the very idea that Eretz Yisroel needed their approval was a breach in trust; yet Hashem tolerated this indignity.

Their real transgression, the one that caused the decree of death on the entire generation, was their refusal to go to Eretz Yisroel even after knowing it was what Hashem desired (14:4). So the punishment wasn't due of their lack of faith; rather it was for not listening to Hashem.

Today, we often find individuals who attempt to explain why keeping *mitzvos* is really better for you – eating pork can cause Trichinosis, Shabbos is a great day to charge the physical and emotional batteries, etc. What gets lost in this apologetic approach to Judaism is that in reality we simply keep the *mitzvos* because we accepted the Torah and obey Hashem's will. We don't just keep those *mitzvos* for which we can devise reasons or deduce Hashem's intent; we keep all of them as that is what Hashem



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desires.

The proof to this understanding is borne out by the end of the story: The next morning they admitted that they made a mistake in listening to the spies who misled them regarding the dangers of Eretz Yisroel. However, they never admitted to the fact that they were wrong in not listening to Hashem in the first place. They assumed they could undo the previous night by showing Hashem that they now agreed with Him by expressing their enthusiasm for Eretz Yisroel. But in reality they missed the point, this wasn't about Eretz Yisroel; this was simply about following Hashem's wishes.

In fact, they immediately repeated their mistake: Moshe explicitly told them that Hashem would not be with them and that they would not succeed. They stubbornly went anyway, feeling that it was more important to show Hashem they now agreed that the right decision was to enter Eretz Yisroel. Once again, they missed the point and didn't listen to Hashem who, through Moshe, told them NOT to go. Sadly, this led to their slaughter at the hands of the Amalekites and Cannanites.

# Everlasting Remembrance

*It shall be tzitzis for you, and you shall see it and remember all of Hashem's mitzvos and perform them (15:39).*

How do the *tzitzis* serve to “remind” us of the Torah’s *mitzvos*? Rashi (ad loc) explains that the *Gematria* (numerical value) of the word *tzitzis* is 600. When the number of *tzitzis* strings (8) and knots (5) on each corner are added to this figure, the total is 613 – the number of *mitzvos* in the Torah.

Ramban (ad loc), however, disagrees with Rashi’s interpretation, pointing out that the requirement for five knots to be tied on each corner of the *tzitzis* is only rabbinic in nature. The Torah itself requires only a single knot to be tied. Ramban argues that the Biblical *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* cannot possibly be based on symbolism rooted in rabbinic law. Indeed, how can Rashi’s explanation be reconciled with this fact?

The *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* is actually a most unusual *mitzvah*. The obligation to wear *tzitzis* is only incurred when a person chooses to wear a four-cornered garment, but there is no inherent requirement to wear such a garment. This makes the *mitzvah* entirely avoidable, which is most incongruous for a precept that, we are taught, is equivalent in significance to all the other *mitzvos* of the Torah (*Talmud Bavli Menachos* 43b).

The explanation for this, however, lies in the very fact that the purpose of *tzitzis* is to serve a reminder to perform the Torah’s *mitzvos*. How does something function as a reminder?

Consider the common practice of tying a string around one’s finger in

order to remind oneself of something; the string acts as a reminder solely because one does not have to wear it. An ordinary garment would not be an effective reminder, since there is nothing unusual about wearing it. The same is true of *tzitzis*: Wearing *tzitzis* reminds us of the Torah’s *mitzvos* precisely because we are not inherently required to wear them. The fact that we have chosen to wear *tzitzis* is itself what creates that reminder.

With this in mind, Rashi’s explanation can also be well understood. The Torah requires us to wear *tzitzis* as a reminder, but it was left up to Chazal to determine the exact form that the reminder would take. As we have explained, an inherent part of the nature of a reminder is that it is worn by choice; therefore, it is logical for the exact form of the reminder to be determined by Chazal. Once the rabbinic law was instituted that required the *tzitzis* to have five knots, then, Chazal were able to associate the manner in which the *tzitzis* were made with their inherent function as a reminder of the *mitzvos*.

The Psychology Behind the Parsha

Practical Applications for Daily Life

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