

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Mazel Tov to Dan and Candi Green on the *aufbruch* and upcoming marriage of their son Zevi to Lina Freedman of Philadelphia. Mazel Tov to Lina's parents, Len and Gilya Freedman. May Zevi and Lina be *zoche* to build a *bayis ne-eman b'Yisrael*.

Thank you to the drasha sponsors:

- Yossi and Devorah Klein, in memory of Yossi's father, Mich Klein, Yitzchok ben Sholom, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 29th of Sivan. May his *neshama* have an *aliya*.
- Marcy Millman and Simcha Brody, on the occasion of the 20th *yahrtzeit* of Marcy's father, Shmuel Moshe ben David u'Malka. May his *neshama* have an *aliya*.
- *L'zecher nishmas* Shimon Asher ben Yisroel (Seymour Kleiman), a"h, whose *yahrtzeit* was 28 Sivan. May his *neshama* have an *aliya*.
- The Gras, Friedman, and Meisels families, in honor of the wedding of Ayelet Friedman and Ben Meisels. Mazel Tov! May they be *zoche* to build a *bayis ne-eman b'Yisrael*!

There is a single word in this week's *parsha* that unlocks the entire story of the *meraglim* — and it unlocks something about our own lives, as well.

That word is *lasur*. When Moshe sends the 12 princes to Eretz Yisrael, he instructs them: **וַיִּתְּרוּ אֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן** "*They shall tour the Land of Canaan.*"

We usually assume *lasur* means simply to tour. But the *Sefer HaK'sav V'HaKabbalah*, written by Rav Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, citing Shada"l (Rav Shmuel David Luzzato), reveals that the Torah chose this word with surgical precision:

הכתב והקבלה במדבר פרק יג פסוק טז: לתור את הארץ. יש הבדל בין תר למרגל לרשד"ל, האישי אשר יתור הוא מבקש הטוב, לתור להם מנוחה...ובהפך המרגל יבקש את הרע, כמו מרגלים אתם, לראות את ערות הארץ באתם...כולם ענינם גלוי הגנות והרע.
"*There is a difference between a "tar" and a "meragel." The one who tours seeks out the good — as in 'to seek out (lasur) for them a resting place.' The spy is the opposite: he seeks out the bad — as in 'You are spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land.'*"

Lasur does not mean to evaluate objectively. It means to look for the good. To go searching for reasons to fall in love with the land. In contrast, *leragel* means the reverse: to hunt for weakness, for vulnerability, for the flaws and problems.

And then *Ha'Ksav VeHaKabbalah* says something remarkable.

והנה מרע"ה בשלחו שנים עשר אנשים לראות ארץ כנען, ידוע הדבר כי לא לצורך שלה אותם, כי היתה ארץ זבת חלב ודבש פי ה' דבר, והיות העם היושב עלי' חזק או רפה מה מעלה ומה מוריד וה' ילחם להם,
Moshe was not sending these men to determine whether the land was good: "That it was a land flowing with milk and honey — the mouth of Hashem had already spoken."

So why send anyone at all?

אך שלחם לתור את הארץ למען יראו את טובה ויגידו כבודה אל עם הארץ, ויחזקו ידיהם ללכת אחרי ה',
He sent them to tour the land so that they would see its goodness and tell its glory to the people — and strengthen their hands to follow Hashem.

That was the entire mission. Go see how good and beautiful it is. Come back and make the people fall in love.

בהמה השחיתו, התעיבו עליה, והפכו מחשבת שולחם — ע"כ אנחנו קוראים להם בשם מרגלים, גם כי בפרשת שליחותם לא נקראו כ"א בשם תרים.
But they corrupted it, they acted abominably, and they inverted the intent of the One who sent them — therefore, we call them meraglim, spies, even though in the parsha that presents their mission they are only called tarim.

Open a *Chumash* and look: in all of *Parshas Shelach*, the 12 princes are never once called *meraglim*. The Torah calls them *tarim*, tourers, seekers of good. *Veyasuru. Lasur*. Over and over. And yet for more than 3,000 years, we have called this episode *chet hameraglim* — the sin of the spies.

Why? Because that is precisely their sin. They were sent as *tarim* and they went as *meraglim*. They were commissioned to seek the good, and they chose, instead, to catalogue the flaws. The sin has a name, and the name is the transformation itself. When Moshe calls them out Devarim 1:24 he names the sin as וירגלו.

The **Malbim**, in his commentary to *Sefer Yehoshua*, completes the picture. When Yehoshua sends two men to Yericho 39 years later, the Torah calls them *meraglim* — and that is no insult:

התר מבקש את הטוב, אם טובה הארץ ואם אנשיה גבורים וכדומה. והמרגל יבקש את ערות הארץ, המקום הנוח לכבשה משם
The tar seeks the good — whether the land is good and so forth. The meragel seeks the vulnerability of the land — the most favorable place from which to conquer it.

For Yehoshua's men, hunting for weakness was the job. Theirs was a military reconnaissance on the eve of invasion. A general's scouts should look for the weak points in the wall.

But Moshe's 12 men were not sent to find weak points. They were sent to find beauty. And a man who is sent to find beauty and comes back with a dossier of defects has not merely failed his mission. He has betrayed it.

Twelve princes walked through identical terrain and came back with two completely different reports. The same land. The same cities. The same inhabitants. The same giant clusters of grapes.

Ten said: **לא נוכל לעלות** "We cannot go up." The people are too strong. The cities are too fortified. We felt like grasshoppers.

Kalev said: **עלה נעלה כי יכול נוכל לה** "We will surely go up, for we can surely do it."

They did not see two different lands. The 10 went looking for problems, and they found them. Kalev and Yehoshua went looking for the good, and they found it.

This is the eternal law of perception that *Parshas Shelach* comes to teach: **what you see depends on what you seek**. The world is remarkably generous. Whatever you are looking for, you will usually find it.

And there is a second layer to this story. For that I want to bring you a teaching from **Rav Shaul Yisraeli, zt"l**, the great Rosh Yeshiva of Mercaz HaRav, who arrived in Eretz Yisrael in 1934 and lived through the miraculous days surrounding the birth of the State in 1948. His reading of the *chet hameraglim*, in his *sefer Siach Shaul*, reflects the vision of a man who watched a generation of giants building our Homeland.

Rav Yisraeli is struck by one strange phrase in the spies' report: **ונָהֵי בְעֵינֵינוּ כַּחֲגָבִים וְכִן הָיִינוּ בְעֵינֵיהֶם** "We were like grasshoppers in our own eyes and so we were in their eyes."

If the spies were objectively small next to the giants, why not simply say "we were like grasshoppers next to them"? Why this odd sequence, first in *our* eyes, and only then in *theirs*?

Rav Yisraeli calls this the first recorded instance of what psychologists would later name projection. Because the spies saw themselves as insects, the world confirmed it. They wrote the script of their own smallness, and then read it back as objective fact. Listen to his words:

הדור אשר ראה נפלאות בארץ חם, נוראות על ים סוף, אשר שמע קול אלקים חיים מדבר אליו מתוך האש — דור זה שכח את גדולתו ותפארתו. ענקי הרוח מתחילים להסתכל על עצמם בביטול ובלעג, הם רואים את עצמם כחגבים. לעומת זאת, וכתוצאה מזה, הם רואים את האחרים כבני ענק"

The generation that saw wonders in Mitzrayim, awesome deeds at the Sea of Reeds, that heard the voice of the living God speaking from the fire — this generation forgot its own greatness and glory. Giants of the spirit began to look at themselves with disdain and mockery; they saw themselves as grasshoppers. And consequently, as a result of this, they saw the others as giants.

And then he names the sin: *זה היה החטא: הביטול העצמי, חוסר ההערכה של הסגולתיות הישראלית*
This was the sin: the self-negation, the failure to appreciate the unique greatness of Israel.

See how perfectly this insight completes the *Ksav VeHakabbalah*. The *tar* who stops seeking the good in the Land has usually first stopped seeing the good in himself. The eye that hunts for flaws outward is focused on a heart that hunts for flaws inward. They could not see *tova haaretz* because they could no longer see *tovas atzmam* — the special nation that recently stood at Sinai was looking in the mirror and seeing an insect.

When Jews remember who they are, a nation carried out of Egypt, addressed at Sinai, promised this Land by the mouth of Hashem, no wall looks impenetrable. When Jews forget who they are, every enemy becomes a giant and every challenge a fortress.

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau tells of his first visit to America in 1974, months after the Yom Kippur War had shattered Israel's confidence. He was then a young rabbi in Netanya, and he went to Brooklyn to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The Rebbe asked him about the mood in Israel, and Rabbi Lau answered honestly: Jews are walking around asking each other, "What will be?" The Rebbe grasped his arm and said with fire: **"Jews don't ask 'what will be.' Jews ask 'what are we going to do!'"**

"What will be" is the question of a grasshopper. "What are we going to do" is the question of a people who remember Whose promise they carry. The 10 men asked what will be. Kalev asked what we are going to do: *aloh naaleh* — we will surely go up.

Last week, together with fellow Baltimore Rabbanim, I had the privilege of spending 4 exhilarating days in Eretz Yisrael on a mission sponsored by *Naava Kodesh*. Part of our mission was to learn how communities are helping *olim* build successful lives in Eretz Yisrael, and how we as Rabbanim can better serve those who dream of making that journey themselves. We met Rabbanim, educators, communal leaders, and families building lives in Eretz Yisrael. We sat with Rav Yitzchak Berkovitz, Rav Asher Weiss, and Rav Yosef Zylberman. We saw a country still carrying the wounds of war and yet continuing to build, to grow, to gather Jews from the four corners of the earth.

But I want to tell you what kind of mission it was, because *Parshas Shelach* has given us the vocabulary. We did not go as *meraglim*. We did not go hunting for the problems, and let no one fool you, a flaw-hunter in Israel today will find plenty to report: the war, the divisions, the cost of living, the bureaucracy. A file of defects writes itself, for anyone who goes looking. Instead, we went as *tarim*, in the precise sense of the *Ksav VeHakabbalah* and Malbim. We went *lasur*: to seek out the good.

And here is what stuns me every time I read his words. He says the mission of the 12 was *למען יראו את טובה ויגידו כבוד אל עם הארץ* "so that they would see its goodness and tell its glory to the people."

That is a job description. And that is my job description this morning. Rabbis went from Baltimore to Eretz Yisrael, and the assignment, 3,000 years old, is unchanged: see its goodness, come home, stand before the people, and tell its glory.

So let me complete the mission the original 12 abandoned. Let me give you the report they were supposed to give: *טובה הארץ מאד מאד* — The land is very, very good.

We saw communities absorbing new families of *olim* in the middle of a war. We saw *yeshivos* and schools bursting with students and excitement. We saw *chesed* organizations — Lemaan Achai, Chaim Vachesed, among others — operating at a scale that defies logic. We saw a people that has every reason to despair and has chosen, with almost unbearable stubbornness, to build instead.

And what we found depended entirely on what we sought. A flaw-hunter and a good-seeker can walk the same streets of Yerushalayim and Ramat Beit Shemesh and come home with opposite reports. Not because the place is different. Because the lens is different.

No one articulated the power of that land upon the soul more piercingly than **Rav Yitzchak Hutner**. When he departed Eretz Yisrael in the early 20's after a period of living there while attending Slabodka Yeshiva in Chevron, he wrote these words, preserved in *Pachad Yitzchak, Igros U'Kesavim*, letter 162 — a letter which I believe was supposed to be the report of the *meraglim* to the people:

בדברי על אודות הפרדה מארץ ישראל אי אפשר לי שלא להדגיש עד כמה קושי אני מרגיש בזה. הה, עד כמה! למי שלא היה בכאן ולא ראה בעיניו אי אפשר לצייר עד כמה מגיעה מדת ההתקשרות אליה

"Considering separating from Eretz Yisrael, it is impossible not to stress how difficult this is... Oh, how much! One who has not been here and seen with his own eyes cannot imagine the depth of connection one feels toward her."

הרבה הרבה מעיקרי השקפות בדעת תורה ובהבנת היהדות נתחוורו לי ונתבססו אצלי רק הודות להשפעתה עלי. שום שיטה ושום מורה ושום מחנך לא היה יכול כל כך לחדור אל תוך תכונותי כמו שעשתה זה ארץ ישראל

Many of the fundamental perspectives of Torah thought and the understanding of Judaism became clarified and established within me only because of her influence upon me. No system, no teacher, no educator could penetrate the innermost depths of my soul the way Eretz Yisrael did.

And then these unforgettable words: **"ברית כרותה לארץ ולתורה"** — "There is a covenant binding the Land and Torah." Notice: Rav Hutner is doing exactly what the Ksav VeHakabbalah described. He saw her goodness, and he is telling her glory. That letter is the report of a *tar*.

But what if a person doesn't feel it? What if the longing isn't there? For that, I want to share with you a *tefillah* composed by **Rav Nachman of Breslov**; a prayer to merit coming to Eretz Yisrael. Listen to what he asks for, because it is not what you might expect:

קל רחום וחנון... זכני ברחמיך הרבים, שיהיו לי ולכל ישראל כסופין ונעגועין והשתוקקות וחשק אמתי לבוא לארץ ישראל

"Merciful and gracious God... grant me, in Your abundant mercy, that I and all Jews should have yearnings, and longings, and cravings, and true desire to come to Eretz Yisrael."

Four synonyms for wanting. Rav Nachman is not praying for a plane ticket. He is praying for the desire itself. And then he explains why:

כי שם עקר יסוד מקור האמונה הקדושה, שם שרש פלילות קדשת ישראל. היא הארץ אשר ה' דורש אותה תמיד, ארץ החיים האמתיים הנצחיים, יפה נוף משובש כל הארץ

For there is the essence, the foundation, the source of holy faith; there is the root of the collective holiness of Israel. It is the land that Hashem seeks out constantly — the land of true, eternal life, beautiful in vista, joy of all the earth.

Mark that phrase: the land that Hashem *doreish*, seeks out, constantly. The Torah says it explicitly: *eretz asher Hashem Elokecha doresh osah tamid* Hashem Himself is, so to speak, the eternal *Tar*, His eyes upon her from the beginning of the year to its end, forever seeking her good. Rav Nachman is praying for nothing more than this: let me see the land the way You see it.

Rav Nachman teaches us that if the yearning is missing, the yearning itself is what we should *daven* for.

And now we can answer a question that sits at the end of our *parsha*. After the catastrophe of the *meraglim*, after the decree of 40 years, what does the Torah give us? The *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*. Why here? Why now? The answer lies

in one phrase: **וְלֹא תִתּוּרוּ אַחֲרֵי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם** — "And you shall not "tour" after your hearts and after your eyes." *Lo sasuru* — the very same root as *veyasuru es eretz Canaan*. The Torah is deliberately stitching the end of the *parsha* to its beginning. And Rashi makes the connection explicit:

ה'לב והעינים הם מרגלים לגוף. העין רואה והלב חומד והגוף עושה את העבירה"

"The heart and the eyes are the *meraglim* of the body. The eye sees, the heart desires, and the body commits the sin."

Every one of us carries 12 *meraglim* inside. Our eyes are scouting the world every waking moment and filing reports with the heart. And the Torah's question is the question of our *parsha*: what are your eyes seeking? Are they *tarim*, hunting the good or *meraglim*, hunting the flaw, the temptation, the reason to despair?

Notice that the Torah does not say "do not tour." It says do not tour *after your hearts and after your eyes* — do not let the seeking run unsupervised. The eye, left to itself, naturally seeks what is frightening, what is tempting, what is immediate. *Tzitzis* trains us. *Tzitzis* is the Torah's answer to the *chet hameraglim*. You cannot stop the eye from touring. You can only train what it focuses on. What to look for and how to see things.

In our final hours in Eretz Yisrael, our group visited the family of a fallen soldier, Etan Avner Ben Yitzchak. *Hashem yikom damo*. He was married for three months to his wife Atara, and they lived in Har Bracha. Etan was not an ordinary young man. At 18, while starting at Mechina Bnei David in Eli, preparing for his army service, he wrote for himself a list of 12 principles by which he wanted to live.

Twelve principles. Like 12 tribes. Like 12 *tarim*. Principles of personal growth and love of Am Yisrael. His final principle was this:

"אין אהבת הארץ בלא ידיעת הארץ. ידיעת הארץ פירושה להבין למה אנחנו כאן, מהי משמעותה של ארץ ישראל, ועבור מה אנו נלחמים
כבר 76 שנה. החיבור קורה כשמקריבים, כשעובדים, כשלומדים"

"*There is no love of the Land without knowledge of the Land. Knowledge of the Land means understanding why we are here, what the meaning of Eretz Yisrael is, and what we have been fighting for these seventy-six years. The connection happens when one sacrifices, when one works, when one learns.*"

An 18-year-old wrote that. Not a philosopher. Not a Rosh Yeshiva. "*There is no love without knowledge.*" Etan understood that love of the Land is not a mood; it is the fruit of seeking. The *meraglim* toured the land and came back strangers to it. Etan toured the land — *lasur* in its purest, highest form — and came back in love. And he gave himself to Eretz Yisrael completely.

The 10 saw themselves as grasshoppers, and so they were. Etan saw himself as a link in a 76-year chain of builders, and so he was. Rav Yisraeli's teaching, written about the Jews of 1948, was alive in that 18-year-old's notebook. Standing in that family's home, I thought of the 12 who walked that land thousands of years ago. Ten hunted flaws and found them. Two sought the good and found it. Etan belonged, eternally, to the two.

We returned from Eretz Yisrael carry something. Not souvenirs, but a new lens. A new way of looking at things. The answer is given to us in this very *parsha*, hanging from the corners of our garments: *lo sasuru*. Train the eye. Seek the good — in the Land, in our people, in ourselves. And if even the longing is missing, Rav Nachman taught us *to daven* for the longing: *zakeini... kisufin v'gaaguin v'hishtokekus* — grant me yearning.

May we be *tarim* in the truest and best sense, in how we see our Land, our people, our children, our challenges, and ourselves. May we see the goodness and speak about the glory. And may we merit to receive the answer to Rav Nachman's *tefillah* — for ourselves and for all Israel **לְנַסֵּעַ וּלְבוֹא בְּשָׁלוֹם לְאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל חַיֵּשׁ קֵל מִהֶרָה** "to travel and arrive in peace in Eretz Yisrael, swiftly and soon." **עֲלֵה נַעֲלָה כִּי יִכּוֹל נוֹכַל לָהּ**. We know that we will surely go up, for we can surely do it. May the sacrifice of all those who have been *moser nefesh* for Eretz Yisrael inspire us to continue to build, to connect, and to see the world through the lens of Torah. To become *tarim* rather than *meraglim*. To seek the good, discover the good, and proclaim the good. And may we be *zocheh* to greet Mashiach במהרה בימינו.