

# INDIVIDUALITY AND THE TORAH

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape #16, Mixed Seating at Weddings. Good Shabbos!*

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## Near Sightedness & Far Sightedness Characterize Beginning & End of Parsha

In the beginning of this week's parsha the Torah relates the story of the Meraglim. We all know that they came back with a very poor report and as a result of that incident Klal Yisroel spent 40 years in the Wilderness. The end of our parsha concludes with the mitzvah of Tzitzis. If we look carefully at the Torah's language, we may find it striking that the Torah uses almost the exact same language in these two sections. In connection with the spies the instruction was given "U'Reisem es haAretz" (and you shall look at the Land) and in connection with the Tzitzis it says also "U'Reisem oso" (and you shall look at the Tzitzis).

I think that the Torah is trying to tell us that there is a connection between the "U'Reisem oso" of parshas Tzitzis and the "U'Reisem es haAretz" of parsha Meraglim: The spies failed to learn the message of parshas Tzitzis.

What is the message of parshas Tzitzis? The Gemara in Menachos (quoted by the Rambam on this week's portion) explains the Torah's linkage between looking at the Tzitzis and "remembering all the commandments of Hashem" (as indicated by the verses) as follows: The Tzitzis contains within it the Techeles, the blue thread. The Techeles resembles the Sea, the Sea looks like the Sky, the Sky reminds you of the Kiseh haKavod (the Divine Throne), and the Kiseh haKavod reminds you of all the commandments of Hashem.

Thus we see from Tzitzis that a human being is capable of seeing much more than meets the eye -- he can see a simple thread of blue, and trace that symbolism to the Sea and to the Sky and to the Heavenly Throne and to all the commandments of the Lord.

The spies were told to see the Land, but what did they see? They only saw that which was in front of their noses -- they saw big people, they saw giants, and they saw a land that was intimidating and scary. Did they see that Eretz Yisroel is the "Chariot" for G-d's Divine Presence? Did they see the

holiness of the Land. No. They were myopic. They were near-sighted in what they were able to view.

This is what Chazal are trying to tell us. A human being is capable of so much... seeing implications, seeing ramifications, seeing results... if only he will look. But, as the expression goes, there are none so blind as those who will not see.

Why did the spies refuse to see? Because they had a "negius" (selfish-motivation). Chazal tell us they were each leaders. They each had positions of honor in the community. They were afraid that if they went into the Land of Israel, they would lose their positions of honor and leadership. When a person has a "negius" that perhaps he will have some loss of honor, he cannot see... he refuses to see.

This is the lesson of Parshas Tzitzis: We are capable of seeing very very far, but only if we open up our eyes and be honest enough to see things as they really are.

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### **Netziv: Channeling Individuality within the Context of Torah.**

The verse at the end of the Parsha states, "...and you shall not stray after your hearts and after your eyes..." The Sifrei says the purpose of this verse is to elucidate the verse in Koheles that says "Rejoice young man in your youth and go after the dictates of your heart". I would not know, says the Sifrei, if the verse in Koheles means "Do whatever you want" or if it means "Go on the straight and narrow path". Therefore, the verse in this week's portion says "Do not stray after your hearts."

What kind of mistaken assumption were we to have made from Koheles that the verse in parshas Tzitzis had to inform us otherwise? This Sifrei begs for explanation.

The Netziv in his commentary on Chumash gives a beautiful interpretation of this Sifre: He explains that the Tanna is bothered by the expression "Lo Sasuru" (You shall not stray). This verb has the connotation of going out and charting new paths (as in "Lasur es haAretz" -- to spy out the land, to find new paths). He asks, why does the Torah specifically use this expression -- don't chart out new ways? The Sifrei answers, because we might be misled by the verse in Koheles. Shlomo HaMelech tells us, as human beings -- follow the dictates of your hearts. Perhaps that means a person can do whatever he wants... the Torah says No! Sure, follow the dictates of your heart... but within the context of Torah. Within the context of Torah Law, do your own thing.

The Talmud says in many places that various Amoraim had their "own" special Mitzvos. They specialized in particular commands that they found particular affinity to, in terms of their own personalities and individualities. This is an appropriate application of Koheles' "Go after the dictates of your heart". It means that if I have an inclination to specialize and excel in a particular Divine Command, then I should do my own thing and excel in that area.

The Torah is an individual Torah. Not everyone has to do all the Mitzvos the same way. But perhaps I would think that if Shlomo HaMelech is telling us "Do your own thing" then you can literally do

whatever you want... Therefore, the Torah must clarify: "You shall not stray after your own hearts." To chart out new courses (sasuru), which are not in the context of Torah...that No! Why not? Because "I Am the L-rd your G-d who took you out from the Land of Egypt". In Egypt, before you had a Torah you were allowed to do whatever you wanted. But once the Almighty gave us his Torah, then, individuality has to be channeled within the context of that Torah.

There is no room, according to Chazal, to make up "new customs", "new mitzvos" or "new ceremonies". This is not Da'as Torah. "You shall walk according to the dictates of your heart": In the context of Torah you may do things, but do not stray (lo sasuru) -- no innovations. We have a Ribono shel Olam that gave us the Torah, we don't have to invent our own Torah. We do not need a "New Jewish Agenda", the "Old Jewish Agenda" is mighty fine for all of us!

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## Glossary

**Tzitzis** -- Fringes worn on four-cornered garments

**Tanna** -- Rabbinical scholar from the period of the Mishneh

**Amora** -- Rabbinical scholar from the period of the Talmud

**Da'as Torah** -- Sanctioned Torah practice

**Koheles** -- Ecclesiastes (written by King Solomon)

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## Personalities & Sources:

**Ramba"n** -- Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (1194-1270) Gerona, Spain; Jerusalem. One of leading Torah scholars of the Middle Ages

**Netzi"v** -- R. Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (1817-1893) Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin, Lithuania.

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Transcribed by [David Twersky](#) Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#)

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#16). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: #16, Mixed Seating at Weddings. The other halachic portions for Parshas Shlach from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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