

# TAKING SPIRITUAL GROWTH ONE STEP AT A TIME

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Rabbi Frand on Parshas Sh'lach

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 509, Ain Ma'averin Al Hamitzvos. Good Shabbos!

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### Yehoshua Was Tempted Like The Other Spies But For The Opposite Reason

We learn in this week's parsha of one of the most tragic incidents in all of the Torah - the incident of the Meraglim [Spies]. Every Tisha B'Av, when we mourn the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, we commemorate the anniversary of the sin precipitated by the mission of the Meraglim - "You cried a cry that was unnecessary on that night; I will establish for you a justified reason for crying on this night for all generations. [Ta'anis 29a]"

This is not only a tragic incident, but also a very difficult incident to understand. The Torah uses the expression "anashim" [people of distinction] to describe the spies. They were the leaders and heroes of the nation! This makes it all the more difficult to understand how such people -- the cream of the crop -- of a generation that witnessed the Splitting of the Red Sea and the Revelation of Sinai could sin so gravely by speaking disparagingly about Eretz Yisrael.

The Zohar explains that these people realized that their positions of leadership, that they enjoyed in the Wilderness, would be jeopardized by entry into the Promised Land. A "new order" would arise for the generation that entered Eretz Yisrael to build a totally different society than that which existed in the Wilderness. Thus, they each realized that entry into Eretz Yisrael would have a negative personal effect on them.

This is how we human beings function, unfortunately. We are influenced by personal motivation. "For bribes will blind the eyes of the wise and corrupt the words of the righteous." [Shemos 23:8] Normally, we associate bribes with monetary payoffs. A bribe does not necessarily have to be money. There can also be "bribes" that distort our vision based on potential loss of authority or importance. Everything that each of them saw was colored with dark-colored glasses as a result of the subconscious feeling "I will go into Eretz Yisrael, and this will be the end of my day in the sun". As

a result, they came to speak negatively of Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Yakov Moshe Kulefsky, zt"l, once told me the following insight in the name of one of the Chassideshe Rebbeim. The Targum Yonsasan ben Uziel comments on the pasuk [versel "And Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun, Yehoshua" [Bamidbar 13:16] as follows: When Moshe saw the great humility of Yehoshua, he wanted to make sure Yehoshua would not be ensnared in the plans of the Spies. Therefore, Moshe blessed Yehoshua, "May the Almighty ('Kah') save you (yoshiacha) from the plans of the spies." Where did Moshe see this special degree of humility in his disciple Yehoshua?

Chazal say that it was Yehoshua who responded to the report that "Eldad and Meidad were offering prophecies in the camp" with the words "my master, Moshe, arrest them (kelaem)." [Bamidbar 11:27-28] What so offended Yehoshua by their prophecies? After all, Moshe Rabbeinu himself said, "if only all of the nation of G-d would be prophets..."

Chazal say, that the prophecy that Eldad and Meidad publicized was "Moshe will die and Yehoshua will lead us into the Land." The last thing that Yehoshua wanted for himself was to become the future leader. Yehoshua was the quintessential disciple. He was the quintessential servant of Moshe. As opposed to our "leaders" who are consumed with personal ambition and lusting for power, Yehoshua was not interested in becoming the next leader. He wanted Moshe to remain in power indefinitely. Therefore, when he heard that Moshe will die and he would lead, he was terribly offended. He demanded that those who publicized this 'blasphemy' be incarcerated.

When Moshe saw this great humility in his disciple, he realized Yehoshua would need an added blessing to stand up to the schemes of the Spies. Yehoshua would be subject to the same "bribe of personal motivation" that the other spies were subject to, albeit for the very opposite reason.

The other spies did not want to go into Eretz Yisrael because they were afraid that would cause them to lose power. They were afraid the mantle of tribal leadership would pass on to a younger generation. Yehoshua's personal instinct would also be to not want to go into Eretz Yisrael because -- based on the prophecy of Eldad and Meidad -- he was afraid that he would be given power and leadership!

The scary thing about this Chazal -- and this is something that should cause every individual to tremble -- is the following: If Yehoshua can be influenced by personal motivating factors and the other great individuals who were sent on this mission could be so influenced by their personal motivating factors -- what can we say about ourselves?

This is why everyone needs a Rebbe, everyone needs a counselor, everyone needs a spouse, and everyone needs a companion -- someone to give him an outside perspective. We all face decisions in life. All too often there are all sorts of personal motivating factors at play. We are aware of some motivating factors and unaware of others. We all make the statement "I know I am a 'nogeah' [personally affected] BUT...". We claim that "I can overcome my personal involvement in the matter."

It is not true. If one knows he is personally affected, he CANNOT trust his instincts. "For bribes will blind the eyes of the wise."

Since we do not always realize when we are personally affected, each of us must "Make for yourself a Rav [teacher], acquire for yourself a Chaver [friend]." One needs a "help-mate opposite him," not a yes-man who will always reinforce what he is saying, but a person who will sometimes be "opposite him." Without such help, how will we be saved from all the personal motivations and agendas that so often crop up in the vital decisions that we all need to make?

### **Taking Spiritual Growth One Step At A Time**

The pasuk says regarding Tzitzis, "And you shall remember all the commandments of Hashem." The Talmud says, "Rabbi Meir used to say: How is Techeles [blue color used in Tzitzis] different from all other colors? The Techeles looks like the sea, and the sea looks like the sky and the sky looks like a sapphire stone and the sapphire stone looks like the Throne of Honor (of the Almighty)." [Chullin 89a]

What is the need for all the intermediate allusions? Cut out the middle- man! Let Rabbi Meir simply say that the color of Techeles is like that of the Throne of Honor!

An important answer that I saw is that in the service of G-d, one must go one step at a time. We must grow spiritually, but gradually. We cannot "grab it all at once." Unfortunately, we see all too many times that people gets into something new and go overboard. It is not well thought out. It is not well grounded. It is a 'fad'. One who bites off more than he can chew is left with nothing.

Chazal say to go slowly. Small steps. "Techeles is like the sea." This we can relate to right away. Later we will be able to absorb the meaning of "the sea is like the sky." Then we can compare the sky to sapphire. Ultimately, we will then hopefully make the connection that sapphire is like the Throne of Honor."

The Rabbeinu Tam writes in the Sefer HaYashar: If one wants to get into some type of good activity, he should not make it too difficult in the beginning. One should take upon himself the 'yoke of mitzvos' bit by bit, based on what he is able to handle.

This is the same idea mentioned before. If one assumes too much at once, he will remain with nothing. We put on the Tallis before the Tefillin, even though the Tefillin are holier than the Tallis. The operating principle is "we ascend in levels of holiness (we do not drop down)." We should not rush straight to put on the Tefillin. We need to build up to that level of holiness by first donning the Tallis, a less sanctified item.

Proceeding gradually and in an orderly fashion allows for great and lasting conquests. One who tries to jump to the top of the mountain, without taking the middle steps, winds up crashing.

The Techeles looks like the sea. The sea looks like the sky. The sky looks like sapphire stone. Sapphire stone looks like the Holy Throne. Take things one step at a time.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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