

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS SHELACH

A Bit Less than 40 Years

And Moshe sent them from the desert of Paran by the word of Hashem All of them “men”, they were the heads of the Children of Israel (Num. 13:3). Rashi writes that anytime the Scriptures use the word “men” (אֲנָשִׁים), it implies important people. This fits with the context of the spies because, as Rashi explains “at that hour” meaning, at the time that they were originally sent, they were important and good people (albeit they later strayed). Based on this, the Vilna Gaon (cited in *Doleh u-Masbkeh* by Rabbi Eliezer Korman, Bene Barak, 1990) explains why the Jews ended up being punished by wandering in the desert for 40 years minus fifteen days. He explains that the Jews left Egypt on the 14th of Nissan and they crossed the Jordan River in Yehoshua’s time on the 10th of Nissan. This makes for 4 days less than 40 complete years. The Torah itself says that from Mount Sinai until Kadesh Barnea (in the Holy Land) was supposed to take 11 days, so anyways they were going to need to travel in the desert for 11 days, so that makes another 11 days of them being in the desert that was not part of their punishment. In short, the Jews’ punishment ended up being to wander the desert for 40 years minus 15 days. However, the problem with this calculation is that when the Hashem presents the punishment for the Ten Spies debacle, He says that for each day the Spies were on their mission, the Jews will be in the desert for a year. Since the Spies were away for 40 days, then this should mean that the Jews should be punished for 40 years, yet according to what we calculated above, their punishment was actually 15 days short of 40 years! To resolve this, the Vilna Gaon explains that a ratio of one year per day means that for every hour that the Spies were on their mission, the Jew would be punished with 15 days in the desert. This is because every year has twelve months in the same way that every day has 24 hours, so dividing the punishment into smaller increments would yield a ratio of half a month for every hour. Accordingly, the Vilna Gaon explains that the fact that the Jews’ punishment was actually 15 days shy of 40 years shows that the Spies did not sin the entire 40 days of their mission. Rather, there was one hour from those 40 days in which they did not sin, so the punishment received by the Jews, when adjusted accordingly, fittingly only happened for 40 years minus 15 days. This is based on the fact that Rashi writes that “at that hour” i.e. when Moshe originally sent the spies, they were good people.

The Spies and the Number 50

All of them “men”, they were the heads of the Children of Israel (Num. 13:3). The *Baal HaTurim* writes that the word “they were” (הָמָה = 50) equals the number fifty in *gematria*, which teaches us that these men were all Officers of Fifty. In other words, when Moshe followed Yisro’s suggestion and appointed officers over 1,000 Jews, 100 Jews, and 50 Jews, these people were appointed to the latter office. Rabbi Chaim Palagi explains differently the

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS SHELACH

significance of the fact that “they were” equals fifty in *gematria*. He explains that the number fifty alludes to the fiftieth level of impurity to which the Jews had almost degenerated during their stay in Egypt. As the Kabbalists¹ explains, when the Jews were in Egypt, they had been on the forty-ninth level of impurity. If they would have stayed in Egypt one moment longer than they did, they would have irrevocably reached the fiftieth level of impurity. But Hashem saved the Jews just in the nick of time and took them out of Egypt before that happened. The spies in the story at hand failed to appreciate this great kindness of God; in fact, they even proposed returning to Egypt (Num. 14:4–5). Because of their denial of this great kindness, the Torah uses the word “they were” (המה = 50) to hint to this subtext.

Why Change Joshua’s name?

And Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun Yehoshua (Num. 13:16). The *Peirush HaTur HaAruch* explains that on the plain level, Moshe changed Hoshea’s name to Yehoshua because when he led the Jewish army in defeating Amalek after the Exodus, he became world-famous, such that people all over the world would recognize him and jeopardize his role as a spy. To avoid that, Moshe simply changed his name. Rashi explains that Moshe added an extra letter *yod* to Hoshea’s name in order to complete a reference to Hashem in his name as if to pray that Hashem should save him from the other spies’ plot. Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (*Meshech Chochmah*) writes that Moshe specifically wanted to make sure that Yehoshua would not join the spies’ plot because he was already a successful general in the previous battle against Amalek, and if would join the spies in making the Jews scared about their chances of conquering the Holy Land, the Jews would lose all hope since Yeshoshua displaying fear would have spelled certain defeat to them.

What is the difference between Bin and Ben?

And Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun Yehoshua (Num. 13:16). Why is the word “son” (usually, בן) in this context vowelized in a non-standard way (as בִּן)? Radak (in the beginning of the Book of Yehoshua) answers that it is because the name *nun* is a short word, so since the word “son” is attached to *nun* it is vowelized differently to make it easier to read. Ramban (to Ex. 33:11) explains that the word *bin* does not just mean “son” but is also related to the word *binah* (“understanding”), and was applied to Yehoshua because he was considered the foremost of Moshe’s students. See also *Megaleh Amukos* (*Ranav Ofanim*, 12). Rabbi Moshe Sofer, author of *Chasam Sofer* writes (in *Toras Moshe* here) that there were two reasons he was called Yehoshua bin Nun, as opposed to ben Nun: Firstly, the word *bin* is

¹ See Rabbi Avraham Saba’s *Tzror HaMor* (to Ex. 12:37) and *Haggadas Rabbi Chaim Vital, Siddur HaArizal, Sifsei Kohen al haTorah* (beginning of *Parshas Shemos*), *Ohr HaChaim* (to Ex. 3:7), and *Haggadas Chayei Adam* in the name of *Chesed L’Avraham*.

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS SHELACH

related to *binah* and alludes to the fact that even though nobody—including Moshe his teacher—reached the fiftieth level of *binah*, still Yehoshu'a wisdom reached a point where he wasn't that far away from it and he could “contemplate” that level of understanding. Secondly, Rabbi Moshe explains that when Moshe added the letter *yod* to Hoshea's name to become Yehoshua (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ = הוֹשַׁע + י), he took that the letter *yod* that was dropped from Sarah's original name (שָׂרָה to שָׂרָי). The only problem is that that letter *yod* did not have any vowels, so Moshe had to come up with a way of finding two dots to add to the letter *yod* that he put in the beginning of Hoshea's name. In order to do so, Moshe took two out of three dots of the word *ben* (בֵּן) to use as the *shva* for the newly-added *yod*, leaving the word בֵּן—with only one dot. This second idea is also cited by other sources including *Heichal HaBracha* (Num. 11:28), *Agra de-Kallah* (here), *Derech Eidosecha* (beginning of Yehoshua), and *Dvash HaSadeh* (113) in the name of R. Mendel of Rimonov. This approach fails to address the question of how the original vowelization under the letter *shin* (שׁ) which consisted of two dots, got an extra dot added in Yehoshua's new name (שׁ). This question was asked by *VaYaas Avraham* (Vilna, 1872, 6).

Yehoshua's Humility

And Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun Yehoshua (Num. 13:16). Targum Yonasan writes: “And when Moshe saw his [Hoshea's] humility, Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun, Yehoshua”. There are several explanations given by the commentaries as to how this Targum should be understood.

In the beginning of the work *Ohr Chadash* (to *Pesachim*), the author explains that in the story of the spies, Yehoshua was over forty years old. Accordingly, the Talmudic dictum (*Yoma* 38b) “Once a person has passed most of his years and has not sinned, he will not sin” applied to him. If so, then why did Moshe feel the need to add the letter *yod* to Hoshea's name in order to pray for him to not stray alongside the other spies, he won't sin anyways? He explains that elsewhere the Talmud (*Chagigah* 5a) explains that sometimes a rabbinic student will get more years added to his lifetime as reward for being humble. Accordingly, when Moshe saw that Yehoshua was humble, he figured that it is possible that due to his humility he will live for longer than a normal lifespan of 70 years, so that now even though he is older than 40, he has not passed most of his years and has no guarantee that he will not sin. Therefore, to ensure that Yehoshua would not sin, Moshe added the letter *yod* to his name with a prayer that he be saved from the spies' plan.

Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua of Apta writes in *Ohev Yisrael* that according to the Midrash, the Resurrection of the Dead will take place in alphabetical order, sorted by people's first names. Additionally, other sources say that whoever has mastered the trait of humility will merit to

Much of the material presented in Oneg! has been translated by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein from Rabbi Elchanan Shoff's weekly Hebrew 'Aalefcha Chochma' parsha sheet. To sign up to the Oneg! weekly email list, or to sponsor a week of Oneg! send an email to BKLashul@gmail.com

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff
PARSHAS SHELACH

be from the first people to come back at the Resurrection of the Dead. Based on this, the Apta Rav explains that when Moshe Rabbeinu considered adding the letter *yod* to Yehoshua's name, he realized that doing so would move Yehoshua further back in the line of people for Resurrection, because the letter *yod* is significantly after the letter *hey* in the Hebrew Alphabet (...י, ט, ז, ו, ה, ד, ג, ב, א). Because of this, Moshe did not originally want to add that letter to his name. However, when Moshe saw that Yehoshua had mastered the trait of humility, he realized that anyways Moshe was going to be one of the first people resurrected, so it didn't matter that his name would be changed to something later in alphabetical order.

The idea that the Resurrection of the Dead will take place in Alphabetical Order is found in the word *Beis Elohim* (*Shaar HaYesodos*, ch. 55) by Rabbi Moshe ben Yosef of Trani, also known as the *Mabit*. He writes that in a certain Kabbalistic commentary to Ps. 119:25,² it says that the Resurrection of the Dead will take place according to the order of the Hebrew Alphabet of people's names, such that those whose names start with the letter *alef* will be resurrected first (so Avraham will be the first of the forefathers to come back). He also suggests that perhaps people will also be sorted by generation, such that everyone in one generation will be revived in Alphabetical order, and then everyone in the next generation will be revived in alphabetical order...

Rabbi Avraham Sofer, son of the *Chasam Sofer*, in his work *Ksav Sofer* (here) offers another two explanations of the to Targum Yonasan. He cites the *Zohar* which says that the spies wanted to delay the Jews' entrance into the Holy Land because they knew that once the Jews entered, they would no longer be in leadership positions. So in order to preserve their own political power, they wanted to delay that entry. However, Yehoshua already knew that when the Jewish People will enter the Holy Land, he himself will be the leader, in accordance with the prophecies of Eldad and Medad. Accordingly, Moshe Rabbeinu saw Yehoshua's great humility and feared that this humility might cause Yehoshua to agree with the spies and try to delay the Jews' entry into the Holy Land in order for him to *avoid* having to ascend to a leadership position. Because of this, it was Yehoshua's humility which led to Moshe Rabbeinu adding a *yod* to his name and praying that he not join the spies' plan.

² I am grateful to Rabbi Reuven C. Klien for sharing with me that this can be found in the ancient work *Kaf Haketores* on Tehillim. The work *Kaf Haketores* has subsequently been published, and its anonymous author (see Sefunot 17, p. 185 regarding who the author might be, as well as a list of places where this work is cited by the chachmei tzfas, such as R. Moshe Cordevero, R. Chaim Vital, and others) since identified as R. Yosef Taitatzak.

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS SHELACH

Grape Days

And the days were the days of the first [ripening] grapes (Num. 13:20). Rabbi Moshe Wolfson explains in *Emunas Itecha* that the summer time is especially associated with the Satan. He finds an allusion to this in that if one takes the letters of the word “grapes” (ענבים) and replaces each letter with the letter before it in the Hebrew Alphabet, one gets the word “Samel” (סמאל), the name of the angel of Esav. The source for this idea is Rabbi Shimshon of Ostrpolia (see also *Kli Yakar* to Num. 5:12 for this connection between “grapes” and the Satan).

Similarly, the Vilna Gaon (cited in *Leket Amarim* by Rabbi Elazar Landau, brought in *HaMaor HaGadol*) why the Torah had to explicitly make a note of saying that the story of the Spies happened at the time of the year that grapes begin to ripen, if this is obvious from the story itself, because the Spies ended up bringing a cluster of grapes from the Holy Land back with them? Rather, the Vilna Gaon explains that the Torah stressed that this happened in the summer months in order to allude to the fact that the spies attached themselves to the Satan. This allusion is found in the last letters of the words in the phrase “And the days were the days of the first [ripening] grapes” (והימים ימי ביכורי ענבים = 100) whose *gematria* equals that of *samech mem*, the first two letters in the name Samel (סמ = 100).

Eshkol enjoys Miracles

***They called that place the Nachal Eshkol* (Num. 13:24).** The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:24) states that Eshkol (whose name literally means “cluster”) was a friend of Avraham Avinu, and this place was originally called Nachal Eshkol because of the grape clusters which the Spies were destined to take from there. Rabbi Shimshon of Ostrpolia (cited in *Vayakhel Moshe*, p. 201) explains that when Avraham Avinu intervened in the war between the four kings and the five kings, bringing the latter to victory, the King of Sodom offer Avraham compensation for his efforts, but Avraham flatly refused to take any gifts, instead saying that the King of Sodom should only pay Avraham’s friends who helped out (Gen. 14:24). Avraham’s friend Eshkol was one of those people, so he received some form of compensation from the King of Sodom. What comes out from this is that Eshkol essentially reaped the benefits of a miracle which Hashem performed on Avraham Avinu’s behalf, so Eshkol represents a plane of existence which *relies* on divine miracles. When the Spies came to the Holy Land, they sought to reject Hashem’s miracles and did not want the Land whose very existence is miraculous. Instead, they “cut off” a cluster (“Eshkol”) of grapes in order to show their rejection of Hashem’s miracles and His offer to give the Jews the Holy Land.

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff
PARSHAS SHELACH

Kefitzas HaDerech for the Spies

And they returned from scouting the Land at the end of forty days (Num. 13:25).

Rashi explains that the Holy Land is considered to be 400 *parsah* by 400 *parsah*, and the average person walks 10 *parsah* in a day. In order for the Spies to have traversed just one dimension of the Holy Land, that would have taken them 40 days. Yet, Hashem performed a miracle for them, shortening their path and allowing them to traverse both the Holy Land's length and width in just 40 days. This idea of Hashem shortening somebody's path (*kefitzas ha-derech*) is found in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 95a) concerning three people: Eliezer (Avraham's servant), Yaakov Avinu, and Avishai ben Tzruyah. One wonders why the Talmud there does not mention that the Ten Spies also experienced this sort of miracle (see *Megadim Chadashim, Bamidbar, Parshas Shelach* p. 276).

The Land Eats its Population

It is a land that 'eats' its inhabitants... (Num. 13:32). Rabbi Dovid ben Zimra, the Radvaz, explains this passage in a *tsbuva* (484). He cites a Midrash which says that a person's soul cannot reach its proper home after one dies as long as that person's body has not yet decomposed. Accordingly, Radvaz explains that the calling the Holy Land "a land that 'eats' its inhabitants" is actually singing the praises of the Holy Land, because it means that when people die and are buried there, their bodies decompose faster and their souls can hasten their return to their proper home.

Nonetheless the Radvaz's explanation is quite difficult because he assumes that the decomposition of one's body after death is a good, while the Rabbis elsewhere seem to say otherwise. For example, the Talmud (*Shabbos* 152b) says that he who has jealousy in his heart, his bones will rot (i.e. decompose) after death, while he who does not have jealousy, his bones will not rot. This implies that the rotting or decomposition of one's bones is not a good thing. The same idea is found in *Bava Basra* 17a which lists³ certain *tsaddikim* whose bodies did not become worm fodder after their death. Indeed, it is quite well-known various stories of different *tsaddikim* whose bodies did not decompose after their deaths.

Reishis Chochma (*Shaar HaYirah*, 12:50) who brings from *Meseches Chibbut HaKever* and the Zohar (2:151a) that as long as one's body continues to exist in This World, the soul will continue to receive punishments in *Gehinnom*, even if they were somewhat righteous. Those sources say that only a few people will never have to suffer through those punishments.

³ The Talmud's list includes Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Miriam, and Binyamin. See also Radak (to Ps. 16:9) who says that some add King David as well.

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS SHELACH

Canaanite Funerary Practices

***It is a land that 'eats' its inhabitants...* (Num. 13:32).** The Halacha is that if a Jew killed another Jew by mistake, then the inadvertent murderer must flee to a City of Refuge as his atonement until the death of the Kohen Gadol. The Chida writes in *Dvash LeFi* (*Maareches Kaf*, 7) that the murderer's punishment ends when the Kohen Gadol dies because when the Kohen Gadol's soul goes up to the Heavens, then all the other souls which were floating around and could not, for whatever reasons, enter the Heavens, go up with him. Based on this, he explains that the Canaanites too recognized this idea and whenever somebody would die, they would wait to bury that person until somebody very important had died, and they would bury all the other people who had died at the same time that they were burying the important person. Accordingly, he explains that on the day the Spies came to the Holy Land, Iyov—who was widely recognized as an important and prominent person—died. Because of this, everyone in the Land of Canaan was busy burying all the people that had died since the last important person died. Because there were so many burials going on at the time, the Spies thought that the Holy Land itself must have been the causes of many deaths, so they branded the Holy Land “a land that ‘eats’ its inhabitants”.

Divine Forgiveness—for the Golden Calf

***And Hashem said, 'I have forgiven according to your words'* (Num. 14:20).** Rabbi Avraham Saba in *Tzror HaMor*, Rabbeinu Bachaya, and the Chizkuni explain that when Hashem said “I have forgiven...” it was said in past tense, because it was not discussing the Ten Spies debacle. Rather, Hashem was referring to the fact that He (at least partially) forgave the Jews for the Golden Calf debacle. Essentially, He said that even though He forgave the Jews for the Golden Calf, when it comes to this episode, His forgiveness will not be as forthcoming. Indeed, Chazal also seem to accept this explanation, because the Midrash *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (ch. 46) when relating the story of the Golden Calf tells that Moshe prayed, “Please forgive the iniquity of Israel for making the Calf” to which Hashem responded, “According to your words, I have done” which the Midrash adduces from the verse in discussion: “And Hashem said, ‘I have forgiven according to your words’.”

Leeching life from others

***And Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh lived from [amongst] those men* (Num. 14:38).** The *Chasam Sofer*, writes in *Toras Moshe* (Parshas Ki Seitzei, s.v. והארכת ימים) and in *Chasam Sofer al HaTorah* (here), that sometimes one person will merit a long life by taking some of the years that were originally due to somebody who ended up dying early. With this, he explains that Yehoshua and Calev merited to live a long life, because they simply “inherited” the years which the Spies who died were originally supposed to live. With this, he explains the passage as “And Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh lived from

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS SHELACH

[the years of] those men.” The same idea is found in the *Kli Yakar* who writes that the righteous receive merits and the merits of their counterparts (i.e. the sinners), and connects this to Yehoshua and Calev living out the lives that the other spies were supposed to have. Nonetheless, this explanation is somewhat problematic because we do not find that Yehoshua lived a particular long life (he died at the young age of 110). Indeed, the *Ohr HaChaim*, following *Bava Basra* 118b understands that “lived” means that Yehoshua and Calev actually “inherited” the portions in the Holy Land which were due to the spies that died, but not that they “inherited” years from their original lifespan.

[Pushing your way through...](#)

And it will not be successful (Num. 14:41). Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (*Tzidkas HaTzaddik* 46) infers from this passage that only “it” (i.e. the Jews attempting to force their way into the Holy Land before Hashem has deemed it the right time for them to do so) will not be successful, but there are other times and other people who could successfully “push” their way into going against Hashem’s will. One such example is the case of Balaam whom Hashem originally told not to go with Balak’s men to curse the Jewish People, but after Balaam persisted, Hashem “relented” and allowed him to go.

[Jews in the desert?](#)

And the children of Israel were in the desert, and they found a man gathering wood on the Day of Shabbos (Num. 15:32). The Malbim asks why the Torah had to stress that the Jews were in the desert, as it is in the middle of discussing their 40 years sojourning the desert; it is obvious. See there for his answer, and also see *Maharil Disikin al HaTorah* (here) for another answer in the name of Rabbi Aryeh Leib Ginzburg of Metz, the *Shaagas Aryeh*.

[Tzitzis is even on Shabbos](#)

Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall make for themselves tzitzis on the wings of your clothes for your generations, and you shall put on the tzitzis of the wing, a blue fringe’ (Num. 15:38). The Midrash *Tana deVei Eliyahu Rabbah* (ch. 26) relates: Hashem said to Moshe, “why did this [guy who gathered wood on Shabbos] desecrate the Shabbos?” Moshe said, “O Master of the Universe, I do not know.” Hashem the said to Moshe, “I will tell you. Every weekday, the Jews have *tefillin* on their head and on their arm, and if they were about to sin, they would see their *tefillin* and turn back. However, as it stands now on Shabbos, they do not have *tefillin* on their head or arm, so this person ended up desecrating the Shabbos.” At that moment, the Midrash relates, Hashem said to Moshe, “Moshe go out and clarify for them one commandment which they will keep even on Shabbos and Yom Tov” and this is the commandment of *tzitzis*. Rabbi Avraham Saba (*Tzror HaMor to Parshas Shelach*, p. 156) expresses a similar sentiment and writes that the

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS SHELACH

commandment of *tzitzis* was something given to the Jewish people to fulfill any day of the week in order to save them from progressively falling into worse and worse sins. By wearing *tzitzis*, a Jew surrounds himself with commandments on all four corners of his person, and this will help him remember what Hashem expects of him.

The Talmud (*Shabbos* 32b) quotes Reish Lakish as saying that he who is careful with the commandment of *tzitzis* will merit to have 2,800 servants attending to him. The *Tiferes HaGershuni* (*Parshas Shelach*) attempts to explain from where Reish Lakish got this exact number. He explains that the commandment of *tzitzis* came in the aftermath of the gatherer who disregarded Shabbos and ended up desecrating it. In order to avoid such a situation, Hashem gave us the commandment of *tzitzis* to serve as a sign to remind us about all the commandments, and about the commandment of Shabbos specifically. The Midrash says that when the Torah reports about Yaakov “and he camped on the face of the city” (Gen. 33:18), this means that when Erev Shabbos arrived, he set up boundaries to delineate exactly how far away from his camp he would be able to walk and not violate the law of *techum* which forbids one from walking 2,000 amos out of the city on Shabbos. Because Yaakov took extra care to clarify his own personal boundaries, he merited to receive an inheritance which has no boundaries (see *Shabbos* 118b). Now, when it comes to the prohibition of *techum*, one is only forbidden from walking more than 2,000 amos if walking straight in any of the four lateral directions. However, the *Maggid Mishneh* (Laws of *Shabbos* 27:1) explains if one walks diagonally, then he may travel a maximum of 2,800 handbreadths before violating the prohibition of *techum*. [This figure comes from a simple mathematical calculation using the Pythagorean Theorem. In a right triangle, if one adds together the lengths of the two shorter sides multiplied by themselves, then one will get the length of the longer side multiplied by itself ($a^2 + b^2 = c^2$). In our case, the length of both shorter sides are 2,000 amos, so $(2000*2000) + (2000*2000) = c^2$. If you plug in this formula, you will see that $c =$ (almost exactly) 2,800]. In short, *Tiferes HaGershuni* explains that because the commandment of *tzitzis* serves to protect one from violating the prohibition of *techumin* which allows one to walk a maximum of 2,800 amos, then being extra meticulous about that *mitzvah* gives one the merit to receive 2,800 servants.

Rabbi Chaim Vital in *Pri Eitz Chaim* (end of Laws of *Tzitzis*) writes that the word *tzitzis* (צִיצִית = 600) appears three times in this passage, so the total *gematria* comes out 1,800—the exact number of servants those who are meticulous in this commandment will have at their disposal. The challenge to this approach is that the Talmud as we have it says 2,800 servants, not 1,800 servants. (It is also interesting to note that the word *tzitzis* when it appears in this *parshah* is spelled צִיצִת not צִיצִית, which also makes Rashi's comments that Tzitzis equals 600 of additional interest.)

Much of the material presented in Oneg! has been translated by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein from Rabbi Elchanan Shoff's weekly Hebrew 'Aalefcha Chochma' parsha sheet. To sign up to the Oneg! weekly email list, or to sponsor a week of Oneg! send an email to BKLashul@gmail.com

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff
PARSHAS SHELACH

Speak Softly

Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, 'You shall make for themselves tzitzis on the wings of your clothes for your generations, and you shall put on the tzitzis of the wing, a blue fringe' (Num. 15:38). Why does the Torah use two different verbs to convey the idea of speech in this passage? First it says “speak” (דבר), and then it says “say” (ואמרת)? According to Halacha, the strings of the *tzitzis* must be spun with intent for the *mitzvah*. In discussing this Halacha, the Rema (*Orach Chaim*, 11:1) writes “the spinning that he does should be done for the sake of *tzitzis* or he should say to a woman, ‘spin for me *tzitzis* for a shawl’”. Rabbi Akiva Eger (there) uses this Halacha to explain the double verbiage in the passage we are discussing.⁴ Rashi (to Ex. 19:3) writes that the verb “say” (אמר) is used specifically when talking to women, because when dealing with the fairer sex, one must speak more gently. The verb “speak” (דבר) on the other hand, connotes speaking harshly and is used when speaking to men. Accordingly, the Torah uses the verb “speak” (דבר) in the context of the commandment of *tzitzis* because that commandment is aimed at the Jewish men, not at the women. Yet, the Torah also uses the verb “say” (אמר) because as the Rema says, spinning the strings for the *tzitzis* must be done with proper intentions, and spinning strings is an activity traditionally associated with womankind. As the Rema said, when one asks a woman to prepare strings for his *tzitzis*, there are Halachos involved and he must specify to her the purpose of the strings so she can spin them with the proper intentions. Because the commandment of *tzitzis* commonly entails speaking to women, the Torah also uses the verb “say” (אמר).

⁴ R. Akiva Eger quotes this idea in the name of the work **ש"ד**, but I have not found any such work which brings down this idea. Nonetheless, Rabbi Shalom Jacob showed me that it is actually found in the *Bris Shalom* of R. Pinchas ben Filta, which should be abbreviated as **ש"ב**. Indeed, Rabbi Akiva Eger himself cites *Bris Shalom* in other places and it is evident that **ש"ד** is a typo that should really read **ש"ב**.