

Kehillah #24



THE PERTINENT PARASHA

Trust Hashem and Do Good

Rabbi Yeshoshua Pfeffer | Rav of Kehillat Ohr Chadash, Ramot, Jerusalem

We need to trust ourselves – our talents, capabilities, and strength of will. But deeper still, we need to trust Hashem.

One of the most terrible statements that the Torah attributes to the Jewish People is made in connection with the Sin of the Spies: “You slandered in your tents and said, ‘Because of Hashem’s hatred for us did He take us out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorite to destroy us.’” (Devarim 1:27).

Like a child who lacks the self-belief to embark on a mission, they felt they couldn’t do it. And like children, their reaction was hardly rational.

How can this be possible? After all Hashem did for us, how could we make the claim that He brought us

forth from Egypt, guided us through the wilderness, and revealed Himself at Sinai, all out of hatred and spite, “to destroy us”? The mind boggles.

Addressing the sin, the Chofetz Chaim (*Shemiras Halashon* 2:18) writes that the people’s downfall was in their feeling unworthy. “Were we perfect,” they said, “we would be worthy of conquering the land and defeating the enemy therein. But since we are all sinful, we won’t make it.”

The Chofetz Chaim extrapolates from this to our own situation. Often, we tell ourselves that following the path of the just and adhering to the fine print of mitzvah observance are for the “truly righteous.” We are far from that level, and, therefore, we give ourselves concessions. “It’s not for me.” The Sin of the Spies teaches us that we can do it. The Torah is for everyone.

Nonetheless, the question seems strong. How could the people fall





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to the terrible depth of making the statement that Moshe Rabbeinu cites?

To expound on the teaching of the Chofetz Chaim, it seems that the primary issue was living with the uncertainty inherent to the human condition. In the desert, the people lived under miraculous conditions: they ate the Manna, drank their water from Miriam's Well, and were led by the Pillar of Fire enveloped in the Clouds of Glory.

Entering the Land of Israel, however, would end this idyllic mode of existence and expose the nation to the frailty, vulnerability, and inevitable failings of human living. Facing the formidable challenge of conquest and settlement of the Land, the people entered a state of anxiety. Like a child who lacks the self-belief to embark on a mission, they felt they couldn't do it. And like children, their reaction was hardly rational. As a child shouting "you hate me" at his parent, the people "shouted" at Hashem.

But the issue doesn't end here. When a child tells us "I can't do it," we know that it's not always a good idea to force the issue. Perhaps the child needs more time; perhaps he needs to grow in self-confidence; perhaps some inspiration will help. What was missing in the Jewish People? What growth did they lack?

The answer comes in the ensuing Pesukim: "Yet in this matter you do not believe in Hashem, your G-d" (Devarim 1:32). The people lacked trust in Hashem. Living with uncertainty,

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weaknesses and vulnerabilities included, requires trust. This is true of every relationship: being in true relationship with others involves the risk of hurt, so that going beyond the superficial requires trust. It is doubly true in our all-encompassing relationship with Hashem.

"Trust Hashem," says the Pasuk in Tehillim (37:3), "and do good." Doing good, achieving anything significant in this world, involves risk. Embarking on a mission of goodness, whether personal or communal, calls us to trust. We need to trust ourselves – our talents, capabilities, and strength of will. But deeper still, we need to trust Hashem, "who gives us the power to make wealth."

Today, there is much to do in the very same context of Jewish settlement of the Land. Let us do all that we can; and let us do it with trust.



The Sin of the Spies, The Essence of Lashon Hara

Rabbi Asher Meir | Torah and Policy Researcher

Rashi opens our Parasha with a question based on the Midrash Tanchuma (*Shelach* 6): “Why is the story of the spies adjacent to that of Miriam?” He cites the answer: “Because she was punished for slandering her brother, and these scoundrels saw yet did not learn their lesson.” The tragic story of the spies, like that of Miriam, is a rich source not only of ethical but also halachic lessons.

The Talmudic discussion of the law of *motzi shem ra* (a husband who slanders his new wife), which is also the main source of the laws of lashon hara, opens with the story of the spies (*Erchin* 15a): “How great is the [destructive power] of lashon hara! We learn this from the spies: if even someone who slanders trees and stones [causes such great destruction], so much the more someone who slanders his fellow.”

Since the unique aspect of the Sin of the Spies was that their slander was related to the entire Jewish People, we will devote this week’s column to the subtleties of the laws of public lashon hara.

The Gemara in *Erchin* (15b) teaches: “What is an instance of lashon hara? Rabba said, for instance, ‘You can find fire by So-and-so.’ Abaye replied, ‘What is wrong with that? He is merely stating a fact.’ Rather, one who says sarcastically, ‘Where can you find fire? Why, certainly by So-and-so, who always has plenty of meat and fish.’ [In the time of the Gemara, gluttony was considered a weakness.]

“Anything said before three people is not considered lashon hara, because your friend has a friend, and his friend has a friend and so on.”

Rabba said, ‘Anything said in front of the subject is not considered lashon hara.’ He replied, ‘In that case it is not only lashon hara but also insolence!’ He said, ‘I hold like Rebbe Yosi, as Rebbe Yosi said: I never said anything and glanced behind me’ [to make sure that the subject couldn’t



MEKOM AVODA

Workplace Ethics & Halacha



overhear – Rashi.] Rabba bar Rav Huna said: ‘Anything said before three people is not considered lashon hara, because your friend has a friend, and his friend has a friend and so on.’

The passage seems cryptic. How does Rebbe Yosi deal with the objection that lashon hara said in front of the subject is insolence? The leniency of “before three people” seems to add insolence on top of the lashon hara. Tosafos seems to understand these additions as continuations of the “fire by So-and-so” ruling. It’s not what you say but how you say it. Saying something in front of the subject, or in front of many people, is not a leniency in itself. But in the case of

But in the case of an ambiguous statement, it inclines towards an innocent interpretation. There is less concern for a snarky negative implication.

an ambiguous statement, it inclines towards an innocent interpretation. There is less concern for a snarky negative implication in these

instances. The *Chofetz Chaim* (2:2) adopts this interpretation.

The Rambam (*Deos* 7:5) interprets Rabba bar Rav Huna’s statement thus: “Anything already said before three people is not lashon hara.” According to the Rambam, it is always lashon hara to besmirch someone intentionally. But if one has no such intention and is merely relaying information with a negative implication, there is no prohibition to do so if the information itself is already widely known.

We could consider “in front of three” to be not a precise definition but rather a halachic term for “widely known.” The *Chofetz Chaim* (2:3) notes this view as a “some say.” Usually, this will mean that a person can rely on a view if there is a great need or additional reasons for leniency.

A third opinion, brought to my attention by my *mechutan* R. Eli Lifschitz (author of the *Toras Imecha sefarim*) is that of the *Yere'im* (191), who explains that the essence of of lashon hara is being sneaky. The focus is not the content of the words but rather the context. If one speaks in front of the subject,





or like R. Yossi doesn't "look behind him" (because he doesn't mind if the subject hears him), or if he speaks in a public forum, then he is speaking with accountability. He cites the verse from Yirmiyahu (6:28) describing gossipers as "brass and iron," referring to hypocrisy: he shows himself as a friend, but, in fact, he is an enemy.

The *Yereim's* explanation recalls Rashi's commentary on the verse (Vayikra 19:16) "Don't go about as a talebearer." Says Rashi, these people visit their friends but then tell others what they saw. The *ChofetzChaim* discusses this element also, but, like this Rashi and the Rambam (*Deos* 7:2), views it as the closely related prohibition of *rechilus* or gossip. The *Chofetz Chaim* writes that among the lessons we learn from the story of Miriam is that while the issues she raised with Aharon were important, they should have been first raised privately with Moshe.

If we examine the spies in our Parasha, we find that all three of these concerns apply to them. The commentators and Chazal find that their words are full of innuendo and

sinister hints. "Yet" the land is strong; the people there are stronger "than us." Or, perhaps heretically, "than Him." The people were completely unaware of their report, and it would have remained confidential among Moshe and the elders had they not addressed the people directly.

The people were completely unaware of their report, and it would have remained confidential among Moshe and the elders had they not addressed the people directly.

Their approach was also sneaky. The mission of the spies was solely to Moshe. The name of our Parasha is *Shelach Lecha* – Send for Yourself. Rashi emphasizes that this was a personal decision of Moshe Rabbenu as part of his unique leadership vision. Addressing the people directly was taking a private communication and making it public. In effect, this is the essence of *rechilus* or gossip.



PARASHA AND PARNASSAH

Connecting the Spies and the Message of Tzitzis

Rabbi Tzvi Broker | Career Coach and Director of Pilzno Work Inspired

At face value, the Sin of the Spies is difficult to comprehend. How is it possible that Jews who personally witnessed the Ten Plagues, walked through the Sea of Reeds, heard Hashem's voice at Har Sinai and ate the manna could have doubts in their belief that Hashem could enable them to conquer the nations of Canaan?

This question is emphasized when we realize that the spies themselves were people of great spiritual standing, and, for this reason, were chosen to spy out the land. The Divrei Chaim explains that the spies' disbelief wasn't in Hashem. It was within the Jewish People themselves. They understood that entering the Land of Israel would be a transitional shift from their current lifestyle of living a supernatural reality in the desert where they could learn Torah undisturbed from the challenges of living a natural life and making a living. The Land of Israel meant living within nature and going to work facing all its dangerous spiritual pitfalls.

The Divrei Chaim highlights that

the Hebrew word for Eretz Canaan – כנען – is connected to the Hebrew word for impoverished and lacking – עני. These great leaders feared that the move would cause the spiritual downfall of the people. Therefore, they would do whatever they could to discourage it.

As we know, the well-intentioned actions of the spies was fatally wrong. Hashem's desire is for us to live within the realm of the natural, and He believes in our ability not only to learn Torah but also to live Torah through everything we do. Through this process, we uplift all the physicality we engage with and ourselves. The Divrei Chaim explains an underlying reason for why the mitzvah of tzitzis was given to Bnei Yisrael specifically after this sin. The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabba* 17) explains that the message of tzitzis is that Hashem embedded mitzvahs into all aspects of physical creation for our benefit.

Hashem sowed the Torah and the commandments into physical reality in order that the Jews would inherit them to life in the world to come.



PARASHA AND PARNASSAH



And Hashem did not leave a thing in the world without giving a mitzvah about it to the Jews. Going out to plough: "Do not plough with an ox and a donkey together." (Devarim 22:10) To sow: "Do not sow your vineyard [with two different species]." (Devarim 22:9) To harvest: "When you

Hashem is found not only within the walls of the beis midrash, but also in the field, in our offices, business conferences and webinars.

The mitzvah of tzitzis was a response to the spies' mistaken mindset, which caused the sin.

Hashem is found not only within the walls of the beis midrash, but also in the field, in our offices, business conferences and webinars. For this reason, tzitzis isn't framed on the walls of our homes as a decoration. The tzitzis strings hang down on our bodies to symbolize that connection to Hashem is accessible in every situation, as low as it may seem.

The call of "And you should not stray after your heart and eyes" is telling us that our relationship towards the physical world is based on our perception. Hashem wants us to stay clear from viewing reality superficially. Instead, through each encounter with physicality we can realize that Hashem believes in us and gives us the tools to actualize both the world's and our own individual potential.

reap your harvest and forget a sheaf, leave it in the field for the poor." (Devarim 24:19) Kneading: "The first yield of your baking should be set aside." (Bamidbar 15:20) Slaughter: "And give the priest the shoulder and the cheeks..." (Devarim 18:3)

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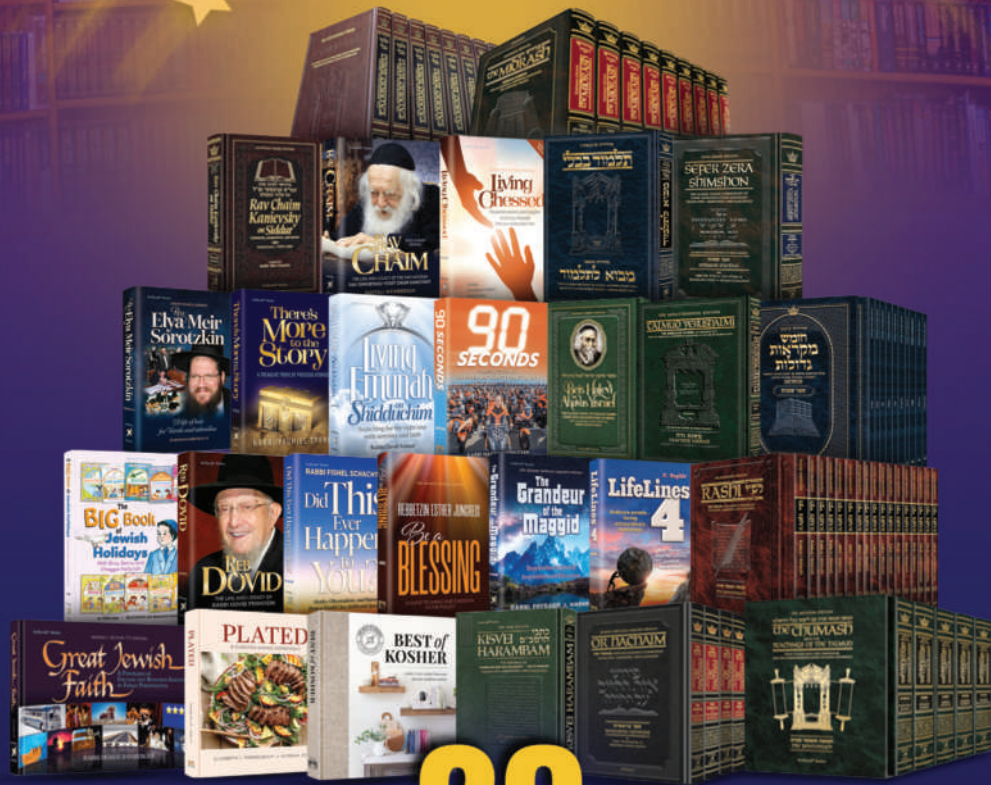



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Lema'an Achai breaks the cycle of poverty in Israel one family at a time by giving people a hand up, not by handouts that often perpetuate underlying issues. We are inspired by Rambam's 8th – and highest – level of charity.

"The greatest level, above which there is no greater, is to endow the needy with a gift or loan, or enter into a partnership with him, or find employment for him in order to strengthen his hand until he need no longer be dependent upon others."

On Rosh Chodesh Adar this year, G. came into our offices at Lema'an Achai. In his hands he had a bottle of wine and a box of chocolates. It wasn't that he wanted to get a head start on his mishloach manot deliveries; he just came in to say thank you.

In a breaking voice he told us his story. For years he worked at an NGO that eventually ran into financial difficulties to the point where they hadn't paid his salary for a few months. The corona

pandemic hit the organization quite hard, and leadership struggled with navigating all the challenges. Eventually, employees were sent on furlough without pay, including our friend. When life started to return to normal, he thought he'd be able to return to his former position. He hoped to recoup the monies that were owed to him. Unfortunately, this did not happen, and he was let go shortly before Pesach. Generally optimistic by nature, he was forced to confront the reality that Pesach would be כולו מרור.

Our friend never had a lavish lifestyle. He and his family lead a modest existence. Nevertheless, he found himself falling further and further into debt. Celebrating Pesach properly looked extremely daunting for him and his family. Money for wine – for matzot even – was nowhere to be found. With few other options, he began knocking on people's doors and extending his hand for help at shuls in the neighborhood.



FOCUS ON COMMUNITY

The Road to Independence

In one of the shuls, he noticed a flyer from Lema'an Achai that spoke of "Smart Chesed – the Road to Independence." G., together with his wife, poured their hearts out to one of Lema'an Achai's dedicated and caring social workers. The team went into action, and the family was given immediate emergency assistance to get through Pesach. After Pesach, he began a rehabilitation program tailored just for him. Our financial advisors, employment counselors and social workers collaborated with the family to help them recover and repay their debts.

G. came to our offices just to say thank you in his humble and sincere way. He wanted to give the wine and chocolate as his קמח דפיסחא to give to another family. This year he would be on the side of the giver and not the receiver.

Never has chocolate tasted so delicious.

Lema'an Achai has begun construction of its permanent home. This new, dynamic epicenter of kindness will feature dedicated space for all of Lema'an Achai's spheres of intervention and will directly and dramatically impact our ability to assist our clients around Israel. As our caseload has grown by 50 percent over the last three years alone, additional space is required to help more and more hard-working families like G.'s. The International Chesed Center will allow Lema'an Achai to do more for more people.

For information about The International Chesed Center, dedication opportunities or any of Lema'an Achai's programs, contact: info@lemaanachai.org

Lema'an Achai's future International Chesed Center.





Leaving Space for Imperfection

Rebbetzin Ilana Cowland

Relationships coach and author of *The Moderately Anxious Everybody*.

I heard Rabbi Yosef Elefant once say that you can spot perfectionists. They are the people who will spend an entire day in bed, regularly. This makes sense. Perfectionists believe that a good day is 100% great. If it's not great, it's a fail. They don't have a sliding scale of good, quite good, very good. It's great or it's a fail. So if it doesn't start great, you may as well call it a fail and stay in bed.

This is an issue they have to deal with and learn their way out of. It's happening in their psychology and in

a partner. A solution to a problem rather than the problem itself. If you find yourself in a relationship that works fine as long as you are perfect, then it stands to reason that if you want harmony, you will aim for perfection.

A husband who is attracted to you – as long as you don't gain a single pound. Ever. A wife who is lovely to be around – as long as you never leave a mess. Ever. A parent who is proud of you – as long as you never get less than 100. Ever.

And what happens should you break these unspoken rules? Maybe the answer is "you don't want to know." Or, "all hell breaks loose." Or, "whatever happens it was my fault." Or, "it's been so long since I dropped my standards, I don't even remember."

The mechanism here is simple. One person is a minefield. Take the wrong step and they explode, in whichever form that may take. So the other person devises a method to spend their life avoiding the mines.

**The mechanism here is simple.
One person is a minefield.**

their understanding of the world.

But there's another type of perfectionism. One that develops as a coping mechanism to deal with



Simple. All I have to do is never get things wrong, (wrong determined by you, and with a non-existent margin of error) and life is fine. If I slip into the margin of error, then the consequences are my fault. So it becomes my job to never trigger you. And your reaction, if I do, is blamed on me. I hold myself 100% responsible for your reasonable mood. And so do you. And therefore, if my failings lead to your bad mood, disappointment or outright explosion, I'm 100% to blame. I have had to become perfect, because anything less means I have failed.

But what if I'm having a bad day? If

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I'm too tired to play perfect? If I'm too tired to clean up? If I need help? If the cheesecake was so yummy I ate too much of it? If I can control myself, but the kids are being displeasing? Then whatever consequences these failings of mine lead to in my partner become what I learn to understand as my due punishment. This is a lack of safety. This is a relationship based on an uneven divide of blame and responsibility. This is one of the subtle mechanisms of abuse.

Now that's not to say that we shouldn't make efforts for one another. Good marriages thrive when we do. We can encourage and foster good habits in our homes. We can make efforts to please our partners. But we do all of these things because we really want to. Once we do these things because we have to or else, then love, encouragement and greatness have been replaced with fear, blame and perfectionism.

Safe relationships are about feeling a desire to do more and be more in an environment that accepts us so wholly for our imperfections that we are encouraged to do better. Unsafe relationships leave no room for our imperfections, or acceptance of the ups and downs of our humanity. Perfect motivated by fear is far from perfect.



Tzitzis: A Mitzvah That Saves

Rabbi Shmuel Kimche

Mashgiach Ruachni at Netzach Yisrael Elementary School, Ramat Beit Shemesh

Mitzvos are gifts from Hashem, though we don't always see them that way. The Zohar calls them *Ittin*, suggestions by which we stay connected to Hashem.

I want to share a wonderful story I read in the fabulous series *Visions of Greatness* by Rabbi Yosef Weiss. For me, the story is a fulfillment of the Gemara in Sotah (21a), which describes how mitzvos protect us, perhaps even while not doing the mitzvah but certainly while doing the mitzvah.

To work. Let's learn a story.

Mr. Albert Azar (actual name), a talmid of the Mirrer Yeshiva, had returned to New York to earn a parnassah but was very careful to set aside time for his learning and was meticulous in keeping mitzvos. As his life as a businessman progressed, Albert was less and less focused on mitzvos. One summer day as he was running from meeting to meeting, he was hotter than usual. Albert looked down and saw his tzitzis. Right then and there, he took them off and decided to stop

wearing them. (Can you imagine?!)

A few weeks later, Albert decided to schedule a major sales trip to Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit and

I want you to promise me that you will always wear tzitzis. Do as I say, and the mitzvah will protect you. All will be well.

Chicago and then make his way down to Louisville, Kentucky. He was excited to rent a car and start his trip. A few days before the trip, our Reb Albert was particularly tired. He came home late, ate something and fell into a deep sleep...

Suddenly, he found himself behind the wheel of a red Chevrolet, driving from Chicago to Louisville on an almost-empty highway. He was cruising along, checking his watch to see how much time he had until his meeting. Half an hour - plenty of time...



STORIES THAT INSPIRE

Suddenly, the car starts skidding and then spinning! Albert loses control, watching helplessly as his car skids off the highway to a ten-meter drop off the side of the road. He closes his eyes and braces for the impact. Amazingly, he's not hurt at all. Breathing a sigh of relief, he tries opening the car door, but it's jammed shut. He pushes, pulls, yanks, kicks and yells, but it doesn't open. Then, he smells it...Fire! The car is on fire! Suddenly, the car explodes...

... and Albert bolts awake! What a dream. He tried to forget it, but nothing helped. The next morning, he davened neitz and went straight to the home of his rav - Chacham Baruch Ben-Chaim (1921-2005; chief rabbi of the Syrian community in Brooklyn).

"Are they trying to tell me something in Heaven? Is this a premonition?" Chacham Ben-Chaim looked seriously at Albert. "Tell me, is there a mitzvah that you don't do now or an aveira that you're doing now?" Tzitzis! "Just a few days ago, I stopped wearing my tzitzis. I felt that they were getting in my way," he said as he gazed down.

"Albert," continued the Rav, "as soon as you leave my office, I want you to go straight to the store and buy

tzitzis. I want you to promise me that you will always wear them. Do as I say, and the mitzvah will protect you. All will be well." From that moment on, wearing tzitzis was a special mitzvah for him.

The rest of the week was uneventful. Albert traveled to Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago and was on his way to Louisville in a rented... red Chevrolet! The highway was almost empty. He was cruising along, checking his watch to see how much time he had until his meeting. Half an hour - plenty of time...

Suddenly, the car starts skidding and then spinning! He loses control and watches helplessly as his car skids off the highway to a ten-meter drop off the side of the road. He closes his eyes and braces for the impact. Amazingly, he's not hurt at all. Breathing a sigh of relief, he turns toward the door but has a sickening feeling he knows what's going to happen. The door is jammed shut! He pushes, pulls, yanks, kicks and yells, but it doesn't open.

Albert sees a lady standing not far from the car. "I saw you flying off the road. I called the police," she says. "There's no time!" shouts Albert, as he pushes himself through a shattered window. At that moment,



there's a huge explosion, and his car is in flames!

Police. Ambulance. Hospital. Shaking their heads in disbelief, the ER doctors tell Albert how lucky he is. They remove his shirt and begin to take off his tzitzis. "No! Don't touch those," he says. "They saved my life!"

The Torah promises that mitzvos shield us and save us. And we learn that the mitzvah of tzitzis is equal to all the mitzvos because they remind us of all of them. May we merit to be connected to Hashem and protected by Him through our mitzvos.

Good Shabbos.



PARASHA HALACHA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

Showing Respect for Tzitzis

Josh and Tammy Kruger

The Story

Shlomo and Immanuel were sharing a canoe on their camp overnight trip. Just as they passed a particularly swampy looking part of the lake, Shlomo suddenly put down his paddle.

"Give me a second, Immanuel," Shlomo said, "I'm just gonna take off my tzitzis."

He pulled his tzitzis from under his T-shirt, placed them in his knapsack behind him, and grabbed his paddle again. Immanuel looked back at Shlomo, "Why did you take them off all of a sudden?"

"It's really hot now, and I'm starting to sweat. I don't think it's very michubad

to keep them on if I'm going to get them dirty and smelly. Also, we just passed by a kinda stinky swampy area that I didn't think was very pleasant either," answered Shlomo, smiling.

"Well, most people don't take their tzitzis off when they're in the bathroom, right? That's worse than a swamp, I'd think. Also, lotsa campers play sports in their tzitzis, even if they get sweaty and a bit dirty."

"I don't know for sure," admitted Shlomo, "but I figure it's the same idea as not putting a mezuzah on a bathroom door or the door of a garbage room. It's just somehow not right, but I'm not sure what the rule is."





PARASHA HALACHA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

Discussion:

Q: What is the connection between our story and the parsha?

A: Parshas Shelach finishes with the last perek of the Shema, which discusses the mitzvah of tzitzis.

Q: Should a man take off his tzitzis when he feels that the environment isn't "fitting," such as a dirty bathroom?

A: It is permitted to enter the bathroom with a tallis katan (tzitzis). Although the Taz (21:3) is stringent when the strings are revealed, it is not customary to be stringent concerning this matter (Peri Megadim).

Q: What if somebody will become sweaty? Should he take off his tzitzis then?

A: If a person will be getting sweaty, for instance when playing sports, it is proper to take off one's tzitzis. It is not respectful to the tzitzis to leave them on when becoming sweaty

(Even Yisrael Vol. 9, Orach Chaim 1).

Q: If one does decide to take off his tzitzis when in the bathroom, does he say a new bracha when putting them back on?

A: The Shulchan Aruch rules that a new bracha is made even if the tzitzis are off for a short time, and this is the Sefaradic custom (Orach Chaim 8:14). The Rema, however, disagrees, and the Ashkenazic custom has become not to make a new blessing if the tzitzis were only removed for a short break, such as for using the bathroom or taking a shower. Only after a lengthy break, such as for a 2-hour game of tennis, would a new bracha be recited.

Back to Our Story

The following night, Shlomo was back at his home telling his family about his adventure. His parents were delighted to see that even though he came back brown and filthy, his tzitzis were still bright white, demonstrating his respect for the mitzvah.

*Written in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer,
le'ilui neshama of Frumit Bat Yosef, Edith Nusbaum a"h.*



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