

Tzitzit: A Tikun for the Sin of the Spies

by **Rabbi Ephraim Sprecher**
Dean of Students, Diaspora Yeshiva

Parshat Sh'lach begins with the Sin of the Spies and ends with the Mitzva of Tzitzit. Is there a link between the two? To answer this question we must ask another.

What was the sin of the Spies? It cannot be that the sin was the very fact that they were sent. On the contrary, we find the use of spies against the enemy camp in many places. For example, it says, "Moshe sent out men to spy on Ya'azer" (Bamidbar 21:32). Likewise, Yehoshua sent out two spies to see the Land and Jericho. Regarding Gideon we find that G-d sent him to spy on the Midianite camp to hear what the Midianites were saying so as to be in a stronger position to attack them (Shoftim 7:11).

Therefore, Ramban (Bamidbar 13:2) does not view the actual sending of the spies as the sin. On the contrary, he writes; "This is reasonable counsel for all occupying forces. The Torah does not advise relying on miracles in all that one does. Rather, it commands that soldiers, once dispatched, cautiously lay in ambush for the right moment to attack."

If the sin was not in the spies being sent, then what was it? Ramban further refines the question. Seem-

ingly the spies spoke the truth and the report they issued was appropriate to what they had been commanded to find out. They had been asked to see if the soil was rich or weak (Bamidbar 13:20) and they answered that it was rich, and that it was a land flowing with milk and honey. To the question of whether the Land had trees or not, they responded by displaying its fruit, as Moshe had commanded that they do. What then was the sin of the Spies?

Ramban answers that the Spies had been commanded to provide information about the Land, and their sin was that they added their own opinion that the Conquest of the Land would be absolutely impossible to carry out. The Spies conducted themselves like some of our media personalities whose job it is to provide the public with facts and information, and who instead take advantage of the tool in their hands to weave in their own commentary, assessments and opinions. This was the sin of the Spies.

Chatam Sofer in Torat Moshe likewise holds that sending out the spies was appropriate in accordance with wartime practices, because we mustn't rely on miracles, but should conduct ourselves according to the laws of nature. He adds that the spies did not provide false information. Rather, the information they provided should have been given exclusively to Moshe, who had sent them (Bamidbar 13:3). It was for Moshe alone to

decide how to use their information. Yet they did not do this. Rather, immediately on the Spies return, "...they brought their report to Moshe, Aharon and the entire Israelite community" (Bamidbar 13:26). They did this with the intention of demoralizing and weakening the Jewish People, like some of the "Spies" of today (Peace Now and J Street).

The Book of T'hilim long ago revealed to us that lack of faith and an absence of love of the Land of Israel are the root cause of the sin of the Spies; "They despised the precious land, they did not believe His word" (Psalm 106:24). Therefore, the answer to the confusion and doubt amongst our generation regarding Eretz Yisrael is increased education towards love of the Land, People and Torah of Israel.

That education is to be found at the end of the Parsha of the Spies, which deals with the Mitzva of Tzitzit. Rav Soloveitchik explains that the blue T'chelet of Tzitzit is a symbol to view world events more deeply than the deep blue sky. The Talmud in Menachot states that the blue thread of Tzitzit reminds us to look up at the blue heavens and to admire the incredible, vast expanse of endless space leading to its source, the Ein Sof - G-d. As Psalms 19:2 states, "The Heavens tell the glory of G-d."

Also, the Parsha of Tzitzit states, "Do not follow your own 'spies' of your hearts and your eyes" - to be misled into sin (Bamidbar 15:39). The Torah

concludes the Parsha of the Spies with, "and you shall see Him" meaning to see G-d in everything in nature (Bamidbar 15:40). Thus the GEMATRIA (numerical value) of the word nature in Hebrew HATEVA equals ELOHIM (G-d). We must teach ourselves to view world events as they really are, as the Torah views them, and not to be deceived by superficial appearances.

This idea applies especially to the Land of Israel. Eretz Yisrael is a land overflowing with beauty and sanctity. Some of its beautiful qualities are revealed, and others are hidden beneath the surface. In a similar sense, the righteous one among the Spies, Kalev ben Yefuneh, saw only the good in Eretz Yisrael, unlike his colleagues, who were deceived by the superficial problems they saw here. Thus, he was called KALEV, the same root as the word KELEV (dog), because a dog is always digging beneath the surface to find the buried treasure.

So too, a Jew in the Land of Israel has to plumb the depths to discover the hidden treasure, beauty and sanctity, concealed in Eretz Yisrael. 🌸