

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE**SHELAH****Haftarah: Yehoshua 2:1-24****JUNE 12-13, 2015 26 SIVAN 5775****SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH
ANNOUNCEMENTS AND SCHEDULE**

Friends – We need assistance and a commitment for Friday nights and all evening services this weekend
Minha & Arbit 7:00 PM
Candle Lighting 8:08 PM

Shabbat

Class with Rav Aharon 8:00 AM – Latest Shema 8:15AM
Shahrit 8:30 AM, Torah 9:45 and Musaf at 10:30
Rabbi David is scheduled to give the derasha

Kiddush this Shabbat June 13th is sponsored by
Segal and Bruce Blakeman
In memory of Segal's father
Ezra Ben Avraham

We can still use Kiddush Sponsors for these weeks
Shabbat June 27th
Shabbat July 18th
Shabbat September 12th

Please let us know if you can sponsor any of these open weeks or would like to sponsor for the FALL
SEE PAGES 2 and 3 of the NEWSLETTER for an UPDATE

Additionally to avoid confusion in reserving Kiddush dates, we suggest you don't rely on simply telling someone. Please email us at SephardicCongregation@gmail.com, with details of date and type of Kiddush or even better, visit our website BenaiAsher.org
And select sponsor a Kiddush and fill in the appropriate fields

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30 with Jennifer
Ages 2-5 - in the Playroom/
Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's afternoon program with the Bach at the Bach for June 5:00 PM
Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 5:30

Class with Rav Aharon: 7:00 - Minha 7:30 PM - Seudat Shelishit 8:00 PM
Rabbi David is scheduled to give the class
Birkat HaMazon 8:50PM Arbit 8:55 PM – Shabbat Ends at 9:08

DAILY MINYAN – Sunday followed by breakfast and class 8:00AM
Monday, Thursday 6:55, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:00AM
Sunday evening – Mincha and Arbit at 7:45 PM

LOOKING FORWARD:**Sisterhood Meeting...Sunday June 14th at 9:30 am**

To make a payment or donate on line
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KIDDUSH UPDATE – June 11, 2015



We can still use sponsors for these weeks

Shabbat June 27th - Shabbat July 18th - Shabbat September 12th

Shabbat June 20th – Reserved Graduation

Shabbat July 4th Anonymous in honor of Albert Yusupov

Shabbat July 11th – Mizrahi Family

Shabbat July 25th – David Golden's 100th birthday!

Shabbat August 1 Azizo – Sutton Families

Shabbat August 8 – Rabbi Aharon Siegel

Shabbat August 15th– Azizo Family

Shabbat August 22nd Yusupov Family

Shabbat August 29th Both Yusupov Family

Shabbat Sept 5th Bibi Family



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Class of 2015

**Graduation Kiddush – Shabbat June
20th**

Sponsors at \$100 ea

**Kathy and Sarina in Honor of Ariella's
High school graduation**



**Rabbi Steven and Aliza Siegel In honor of: Chayim Yitzchak ' s
graduation from the pre-school of Yeshiva Ketana of Long Island and
In honor of: Nechama Tikva's graduation from the middle school of
Shulamith School for Girls**

**Rebetzin Ida in honor of Baruch Yechiel and Baruch Shalom both
graduating Medical School, Shifra Abittan graduation Manhattan High
School as valedictorian and Nicole Abittan who will be graduating
HALB as valedictorian**

**Lisa Gaon sponsors to honor all the kids of the Synagogue (and
especially Esther Tova) for all the efforts they put forth in school**

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**Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue,
 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us!
 212-289-2100 – Mincha– The most important
 tefilah of the day –Give us 11 minutes and we'll
 give you the World To Come!**

Editors Notes

The Supreme Court and the little Yud

The past week we tried something new in our morning class in the city. On many days there is a small class in one room with Rabbi Ralph Sarway teaching chumash with Rashi while in the main room we try to focus on an aspect of the perasha trying to uncover and explain what we refer to as pink elephants in the room. This week we combined the classes where Rabbi Sarway explained the pasuk with Rashi and paused for the color commentary. I felt like the Howard Cosell on Monday night football often using the sources on my phone to take us beyond the peshat.

For example, last week when discussing the very end of the portion and the verse: "And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married; for he had married a Cushite woman", Rashi quoting Tanchuma says that this refers to Siporah the daughter of Yitro who was Moses' wife. How did Midyan which is present day Jordan Iraq become Africa? Rashi writes: "Moses' wife was a Midianite, not a Cushite, but] Scripture teaches that everyone acknowledged her beauty just as everyone acknowledges a Cushite's blackness." And Rashi continues: "She was called "the Cushite" [the Ethiopian] on account of her beauty, as a man would call his handsome son "Cushite" to negate the power of the evil eye".

It was interesting how this answer did not sit well with so many of the guys in the class. And it was even more interesting to see that there were 33 various opinions on the subject that we located in a quick search ranging from those who elucidated the words of Rashi to those who totally disagreed. We even found a source through Josephus explaining that Moses, the son of Pharaoh's daughter was in fact a general in the Egyptian army prior to leaving Egypt and in counter against Cush the Egyptian enemy, Moses wed the Queen. The Midrash explains that after running from Egypt, Moses settled in Cush for many years, where following an amazing military victory (the same one Josephus describes), Moses marries the Queen but never consummates the

marriage. Shadal – Shemuel David Luzzatto – rejects both explanations and was unwilling to accept the explanation that Moses had separated from his wife for spiritual reasons. He rejects the celibacy of Moses and claims the woman Miriam is referring to is a new wife Moses takes in addition to Siporah in the desert. Many of the explanations by the great sages are developed into life lessons revealing the endless depth of the wisdom of Torah.

On Tuesday, we were looking at this week's portion discussing the meraglim which we translate as spies. The verses begin with the names of those who went to tour the land and bring back a report. We are told that Moses changes the name of Hoshea to Yehoshua and Rashi explains the name change quoting the Talmud in Sotah, "He prayed on his behalf, "May God save you from the counsel of the spies".

Although in my old age I can no longer recall a phone number three seconds after I see it, I was able to recall a conversation between Hashem and King David as quoted in the Talmud Sanhedrin. David is asking Hashem to remove the story of his sin from scripture. G-d replies: That is impossible. I removed a Yud from Sarai (when I changed her name to Sarah), and the Yud was complaining for hundreds of years until I added it to Hoshe'a (when I changed his name to Yehoshua). All the more so, I cannot omit an entire Perashah.

So someone asked, "What was the significance of taking a Yud from Sarai's name? Where does Sarah's Yud help Yehoshua"?

I recalled hearing explanations from Rabbi Abittan, and in taped classes from Rabbi Mansour and Rabbi Frand. (Its amazing what one can learn sitting in traffic during the daily commute).

Last week we read in the incident we described above regarding Miriam and Aaron speaking about Moses' wife that Moses our teacher was the most humble of men. The student definitely learns and takes the quality of his teacher. If Moses was humble than certainly his student Joshua would be humble and that humility might work against him when challenged by ten great leaders.

Rav Elyakim Schlesinger, in his commentary Beis Av, suggests that Yehoshua needed a certain quality of Sarah, part of her character, in order to withstand the pressures exerted by his fellow scouts.

We read in the Book of Bereshit (chapter 21) that Sarah appealed to her husband, Abraham, to send

away Yishmael. Now remember that Yishmael is not only Abraham's son, he is in a way Sarah's own surrogate child. Sarah recognized the potential danger that Yishmael posed to her own son, Isaac, and insisted that Abraham send away Yishmael. Abraham at first refused, but Hashem then told him to submit to Sara's request.

Rabbi Mansour states: This was a very bold and courageous measure on Sarah's part. Abraham was obviously a great man, one of the greatest people who ever lived, but Sarah nevertheless took a position in disagreement with her husband. She saw a pressing need and recognized the urgency of the situation, and she had the conviction to do what was necessary to protect her son. Opposing Abraham Abinu is no small matter, but Sarah's principled conviction led her to undertake this bold measure.

Moses understood that Joshua would need this quality as he set out on his mission. He would be forced to resist the majority, to swim against the current, and oppose the other spies. Joshua thus required the boldness and courage of Sarah Imenu. The same quality that led Sarah to demand Yishmael's expulsion led Joshua to oppose the plot of the other spies. Moshe therefore took a letter from Sarah Imenu, representing this aspect of her personality, and gave it to his disciple.

And just maybe that letter came with a little piece of her soul reminding all of us that humility is paramount, but we must never forget to stand up for what is right.

In closing, there is also the explanation suggested by Rabbi Nissan Alpert: It was our mother Sarah who stated: "This one will not inherit with my son" Yishmael will not have a portion in this land. It belongs completely to Isaac, with no partnership and no compromise. The land of Israel belongs to the Jewish nation. It does not belong to Ishmaelites. It is ours. Moshe hoped that this little Yud, this little piece of Sarah our mother would fortify Joshua to take the attitude of Sarah and remember this land is ours.

How apropos that this portion falls during the week the Supreme Court ruled that the State Department can continue listing Jerusalem without the need to state Jerusalem, Israel and supporting the premise that Jerusalem is in dispute and does not belong to us.

We need to all take that little Yud and that piece of Sarah and remember that regardless of what others state, this land belongs to the Jewish nation. This land belongs to us. Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading by NATHAN I DWECK Shelach - The parasha of the spies (year 2)

- 1- Spies are appointed to explore Eretz Israel before we entered the land
- 2- The spies come back with a negative report. Benei Israel cries & complains
- 3- Hashem resolves to punish benei Israel. Moshe fights to save them
- 4- Benei Israel are told they will spend 40yrs in the midbar. A group tries to enter Israel w/o permission
- 5- The parsha discusses the meal offering and libations that are brought with korbanot
- 6- The mitsva to separate challah, a kahal who sins with avoda zara by mistake
- 7- An individual who sins with avoda zara by mistake. The one who gathered wood on shabbat. The parasha of sinit.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"Send forth for yourself men." (Bemidbar 13:2)

The spies brought a negative report about the Land of Israel. Such great men – where did they go wrong? One of the well-known explanations is that deep down inside they didn't want to enter the land because it would mean the loss of their prestigious positions as leaders of the Jewish people. So they came up with a seemingly well-meant reason why it wasn't good for the Israelites to enter the land.

Rabbi Dovid Kaplan takes this explanation a little further. Of course the spies didn't tell anyone what was really motivating them and it is likely that they didn't even admit it to themselves, but our Sages say this is what was going on inside. There was a certain degree of self-deception regarding their motives and this is an important lesson for us to take out of this perashah – that we must be on guard not to engage in any form of self-deception.

One of the areas where, unfortunately, self-deception takes place has to do with certain expressions that have crept into our language due to the influence of the self-deceiving society around us. Let's cite a number of examples.

The first is "quality time." This is often used to describe pleasant time spent together with one's child or children, implying that time spent amidst the chaos of getting kids off to school or being awake in the middle of the night with a cranky baby is not quality time. Any time spent with a child who needs the parent is quality time, and it is certainly quality time for the parents, as it trains them to be focused on others, one of the reasons Hashem gives us children to begin with.

Furthermore, there is an underlying justification in this expression for being able to spend less time with one's children. A self-oriented (another fancy term; it replaces "selfish") parent may feel he or she doesn't want to "waste time" on the children's needs, so passing the buck to a babysitter or a night nurse can then be justified with the excuse that it's not quality time anyhow, so why put oneself out for it?

We are not saying that all parents are capable of being with kids and maintaining the patience level necessary all the time. Some mothers are actually better mothers by being out of the house at work for a number of hours each day, but let's call a spade a spade and drop the rationalization and dishonesty contained in this expression.

And then there is "anger management." It runs something like this: "I threw a chair in the house yesterday. My life coach says I have an anger management issue." Now that's pretty impressive. This guy has a clinical problem that is really not his fault. I see. Whatever happened to calling him an angry man who must work on his character (middot)? Twenty minutes a day of the book *Orhot Sadikim* on anger would go a long way towards helping him – even more than meeting for five years with a counselor or a life coach. Shabbat Shalom; Rabbi Reuven Semah

When the spies came back from touring the land of Israel with a negative report, they said those infamous words, "the nations are stronger than us/than Him. They used the words *ubnn tuv ezi* which can be interpreted as either "stronger than us" or G-d forbid "stronger than Hashem!" How could anyone say such a thing, let alone great leaders like the ten men chosen to be spies?

The Hafess Hayim says that they were really saying we are not worthy of a miracle, so therefore Hashem will not be able to overcome these nations. Not because of a lack of Hashem's power but because of our limitations, Hashem will not be able to do miracles for us. The lesson from this is that this is also wrong! We should never look at ourselves as so down that Hashem cannot help us. He can always help, He can always save, and we must turn to Him at all times, no matter what level we are on!

Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

IT'S ALL GOOD

"And how is the Land in which it dwells, is it good or bad?" (Bemidbar 13:19)

How could Moshe entertain the possibility that Eress Yisrael could be bad in any way?

The Kotzker Rebbe answers that Moshe did not really consider that Eress Yisrael could be bad in any way. However, he knew that the spies may not be capable of perceiving everything they saw in a

positive light. Therefore, Moshe wanted them to report to him first and tell him their impression of what they saw, and then he would show them how, in reality, everything that they experienced was actually very good, and not as they initially perceived it. The best example of this was the many funerals that took place; everywhere they went, the spies witnessed the Canaanites burying their dead. To them, this phenomenon painted a very dangerous, undesirable picture of the Land. If they would have first consulted with Moshe, however, then he would have shown them how the numerous deaths were in fact a miraculous act of kindness from Hashem, done in order to ensure the spies' safety.

The greatness of our Torah leaders is their ability to see beyond the field of vision that we are capable of. The following story which took place in 1939 demonstrates this point very well.

In 1939, as Germany invaded Poland, Reb Yitzchak Gvirzman, the Pshevorsker Rebbe, fled with many other Jews to Lemberg, which was under Russian control. Once in Lemberg, the Jewish refugees had to decide whether they should accept the Russian citizenship that they were immediately offered, or reject it. No one knew what to do. Should they accept citizenship in order not to offend their new hosts, or remain in a state of limbo, waiting to see how the war would end? The question was posed to the Pshevorsker Rebbe who advised that citizenship should not be taken up. Although several families ignored his advice, many Jewish immigrants accepted the Rebbe's ruling and hoped for the best.

On the 23rd of Sivan the following year, the KGB stormed into Lemberg and arrested all the Jews who had refused citizenship a year earlier. These Jews were swiftly taken and placed in cattle cars heading to Siberia. There was anger and depression in the air and many people voiced their rage at the Pshevorsker Rebbe whom they held responsible for their fate – if they would have only accepted citizenship, they would still be at home, living normally!

The Pshevorsker Rebbe consoled them and reassured them that the date was the 23rd of Sivan, which was the day that Ahashverosh revoked the letters that Haman had sent out ordering the massacre of the Jews. "Just like the 23rd of Sivan was a day of salvation for the Jews all that time ago," he explained, "so it will be a day of salvation for us too."

The Pshevorsker Rebbe's words proved true for everyone who had been sent to Siberia. Soon after their deportation, the Germans invaded Lemberg and killed almost all of the remaining Jewish population there. Those in Siberia were far out of reach of the German army and were saved from almost certain death. In addition, their refusal to

accept Russian citizenship meant that when the war ended, they were free to leave Russia, unlike those surviving Jews who had sworn allegiance to Mother Russia. (Short Vort)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR **Balanced Humility**

Parashat Shelah tells the tragic story of the Meragelim, the scouts, who were sent to explore the Land of Israel and returned with a negative report. We read that before Moshe sent the scouts, he made a name change: Yehoshua, who until this point had been called Hoshea, was now renamed Yehoshua (13:16). Moshe added the letter "Yod" to the beginning of the name "Hoshea," which yielded the name "Yehoshua."

Rashi explains that this name change served as a form of prayer on Yehoshua's behalf, asking God to protect him from the scheme of the other spies. Already at this point, Moshe suspected that the scouts might report negatively about Eretz Yisrael in an effort dissuade the people from entering the land, and he therefore prayed that at least Yehoshua would be protected from their influence.

The obvious question arises, why did Moshe not pray on behalf of all the scouts? If, indeed, he was fearful of the consequences of this mission, why not offer a prayer that all twelve Meragelim be saved from this trap?

The answer, perhaps, emerges from the translation of Targum Onkelos (an ancient Aramaic translation of the Torah) to this verse, which interprets it to mean that Moshe changed Hoshea's name "upon seeing his humility." Moshe's prayer for Yehoshua's was prompted by Yehoshua's unique humility. Generally speaking, humility is, of course, among the most admirable qualities. In fact, the Torah describes Moshe in Parashat Beha'alotecha (12:3) as the most humble man on earth, and it was thus only natural that his closest disciple, Yehoshua, would follow this example.

However, excessive humility poses the risk of undermining one's ability to oppose evil. In Yehoshua's case, ten of the scouts – all of whom were initially noble and righteous men – adamantly insisted on reporting negatively about the Land of Israel and advising the people against attempting to capture it. A modest man in Yehoshua's position would likely ask himself, "Who am I to oppose them? If these ten great men think this is what should be done, how can I argue? I am no better than them!"

This was Moshe's concern. Well aware of his disciple's unparalleled humility, Moshe feared that Yehoshua would be unable or unwilling to stand up to the majority, to exclude himself from their scheme and speak positively and encouragingly about the conquest of the Land of Israel.

Moshe therefore added the letter "Yod" to Hoshea's name. The Rabbis explain that this letter was taken from the name of our matriarch Sara, who was originally named "Sarai," which ends with "Yod." The "Yod" that was dropped when God changed her name to Sara was now added to Hoshea's name to form Yehoshua. Sara exemplified the strength, courage and confidence to insist upon doing the right thing. We read in the Book of Bereshit (21:10-11) that when Sara noted the dangerous influences exerted by her stepson, Yishmael, on her son Yishak, she demanded that Yishmael be sent away from the home. Avraham refused, but Sara insisted, and God instructed Avraham to listen to Sara. Sara had the courage to insist upon the correct mode of action even in opposition to Avraham, and it was this courage and strength that Moshe sought to bestow upon his otherwise humble student, Yehoshua.

Humility is a critically important trait, the quality for which Moshe Rabbenu himself is most famously known. However, humility must never cause a person to surrender his ideals and values in deference to other who seek to undermine those values; one must always have the inner strength, courage and resolve to oppose evil and, when necessary, stand up to the majority and assert his position.

Rabbi Wein **FIFA AND RABBI RISKIN**

There is much irony present in the news of the day and there also are connections between stories about apparently disparate subjects that can be easily overlooked. As unlikely as it seems, I discern a distinct connection between the debacle and justified humbling of FIFA – the self-proclaimed holy guardian of world football/soccer and of international sports generally – and the ill-timed, ill- advised and wrongheaded attempt by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel to attempt not to renew Shlomo Riskin's tenure as Chief Rabbi of Efrat.

The behavior of FIFA in entertaining the shameful attempt by the Palestinian Authority to exclude Israel from this world soccer organization somehow triggered a slew of events, which has discredited FIFA. In effect, it is now almost a disgrace to be a member of that organization. Corrupt to the core, led

by a conceited, egotistical executive head and hypocritically portraying itself as being a force for peace, morality and unity, FIFA has been exposed as the imposter that it is.

As a believing Jew, I cannot help but chuckle to myself that FIFA's undoing was somehow connected, time wise, to its willingness to be used as an agent of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish propaganda and boycott. In its sham moral piety and current political correctness, it hastily took up a wrong and absurd cause and established itself as an arbitrator of diplomatic disputes and a decisor regarding matters having nothing to do with soccer and sports. It has shot itself in the foot and been exposed as the criminal organization it is. There are no coincidences in God's world.

Another organization, which is seemingly bent on self-destruction is the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. Also racked by recent scandal and shameful leadership, and having lost most of its credibility and constituency over the past few decades, the Chief Rabbinate is somehow now preoccupied with not renewing the tenure of Rabbi Shlomo Riskin as Chief Rabbi of Efrat.

There are very few rabbis in the world who have done more for the cause of Torah education, synagogue and community service, and building the Land of Israel than Rabbi Riskin. This is not meant as a eulogy, God forbid, and he does not need my approval or approbation. By attacking him however, the Chief Rabbinate is only exposing its own weaknesses, shortcomings and complete misunderstanding of the nature and mood of the people that it is supposed to serve.

The haredi section of Israeli society has long abandoned the rulings and personages of the official Chief Rabbinate of Israel. It has successfully infiltrated that institution, which it regards in contempt and derision, and has gained control-granting itself power, patronage, jobs, money and an entrenched bureaucracy. This is a remarkable achievement since it loudly proclaims that it does not support the institution itself nor even deem it to be legitimate.

Because of the ineffectiveness of the Chief Rabbinate and its disattachment from Israeli society, it also has very little influence or presence in Israeli secular society. Except for official marriage and/or divorce proceedings, the secular Israeli has no connection whatsoever to the institution of the Chief Rabbinate.

The only remaining constituency that at least pays lip service and allegiance to the Chief Rabbinate has been the Religious Zionist section of Israeli society. Singling out Rabbi Riskin for attack and removal will certainly alienate this last constituency. There is no justification for this action against Rabbi Riskin except raw politics and the need for the power to intimidate others.

The Chief Rabbinate should be busy repairing its public image, so tarnished by scandal and bureaucratic inefficiency. A public expulsion of one of the leading rabbinic figures in world Jewry can only further diminish any respect left for the institution of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate.

Like FIFA, the Chief Rabbinate is engaged in a cause that will eventually backfire. That this is not apparent to the Chief Rabbinate itself is testimony enough as to its disconnect from the reality of current day Israeli society and, in fact, from world Jewry at large. A rabbinate that is so disconnected from its society and has forfeited most of its constituency cannot exist and function for very long.

Eventually, this rabbinate will be called into question. The burden of proof in this instance certainly does not lie with Rabbi Riskin. It lies squarely with the Chief Rabbinate itself, which would be wise to stop this exercise of unjust power and begin to truly tend to the flock of Israel, which has been entrusted to it.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Assembling Reminders

You are driving ever so slightly above the speed limit. You see a police car in your rear view mirror. You slow down. You know perfectly well that it is wrong to exceed the speed limit whether anyone is watching or not, but being human, the likelihood of being found out and penalized makes a difference.

Recently a series of experiments has been conducted by psychologists to test the impact of the sense of being observed on pro-social behaviour. Chenbo Zhong, Vanessa Bohns and Francesca Gino constructed a test to see whether a feeling of anonymity made a difference. They randomly assigned to a group of students either sunglasses or clear eyeglasses, telling them that they were testing reactions to a new product line. They were also, in an apparently unrelated task, given six dollars and chance of sharing any of it with a stranger. Those wearing clear glasses gave on average \$2.71 while those wearing dark sunglasses gave an average of \$1.81. The mere fact of wearing sunglasses, and

thus feeling unrecognised and unrecognisable, reduced generosity. In another experiment, they found that students given the opportunity to cheat in a test were more likely to do so in a dimly lit room than in a brightly lit one. The more we think we may be observed, the more generous and moral we become.

Kevin Haley and Dan Fessler tested students on the so-called Dictator Game, in which you are given, say, ten dollars, together with the opportunity of sharing any or none of it with an anonymous stranger. Beforehand, and without realising it was part of the experiment, some of the students were briefly shown a pair of eyes as a computer screen saver, while others saw a different image. Those exposed to the eyes gave 55 per cent more to the stranger than the others. In another study researchers placed a coffee maker in a university hallway. Passers-by could take coffee and leave money in the box. On some weeks a poster with watchful eyes was hanging on the wall nearby, on others a picture of flowers. On the weeks where the eyes were showing, people left on average 2.76 times as much money as at other times.[1]

Ara Norenzayan, author of the book *Big Gods* from which these studies are taken, concludes that "Watched people are nice people." That is part of what makes religion a force for honest and altruistic behaviour: the belief that God sees what we do. It is no coincidence that, as belief in a personal God has waned in the West, surveillance by CCTV and other means has had to be increased. Voltaire once said that whatever his personal views on the matter he wanted his butler and other servants to believe in God because then he would be cheated less.

Less obvious is the experimental finding that what makes the difference to the way we behave is not simply what we believe, but rather the fact of being reminded of it. In one test, conducted by Brandon Randolph-Seng and Michael Nielsen, participants were exposed to words flashed for less than 100 milliseconds, that is, long enough to be detected by the brain but not long enough for conscious awareness. They were then given a test in which they had the opportunity to cheat. Those who had been shown words relating to God were significantly less likely to do so than people who had been shown neutral words. The same result was yielded by another test in which, beforehand, some of the participants were asked to recall the Ten Commandments while others were asked to remember the last ten books they had read. Merely being reminded of the Ten Commandments reduced the tendency to cheat.

Another researcher, Deepak Malhotra, surveyed the willingness of Christians to give to online charitable appeals. The response was 300 per cent greater if the appeal was made on a Sunday than on any other day of the week. Clearly the participants did not change their minds about religious belief or the importance of charitable giving between weekdays and Sundays. It was simply that on Sundays they were more likely to have thought about God on that day. A similar test was carried out among Muslims in Morocco, where it was found that people were more likely to give generously to charity if they lived in a place where they could hear the call to prayer from a local minaret.

Nazorayan's conclusion is that 'Religion is more in the situation than in the person,'[2] or to put it another way, what makes the difference to our behaviour is less what we believe than the phenomenon of being reminded, even subconsciously, of what we believe.

That is precisely the psychology behind the mitzvah of tsitsit in this week's parsha:

This shall be your tsitsit and you shall see it and remember all the Lord's commandments and keep them, not straying after your heart and after your eyes, following your own sinful desires. Thus you will be reminded to keep all My commandments, and be holy to your God. (Num. 15: 39)

The Talmud[3] tells the story of a man who, in a moment of moral weakness, decided to pay a visit to a certain courtesan. He was in the course of removing his clothes when he saw the tsitsit and immediately froze. The courtesan asked him what was the matter, and he told her about the tsitsit, saying that the four fringes had become accusing witnesses against him for the sin he was about to commit. The woman was so impressed by the power of this simple command that she converted to Judaism.

We sometimes fail to understand the connection between religion and morality. Dostoevsky is said to have said that if God did not exist all would be permitted.[4] This is not the mainstream Jewish view. According to Rav Nissim Gaon, the moral imperatives accessible to reason have been binding since the dawn of humanity.[5] We have a moral sense. We know that certain things are wrong. But we also have conflicting desires. We are drawn to do what we know we should not do, and often we yield to temptation. Anyone who has ever tried to lose weight knows exactly what that means. In the moral domain, it is what the Torah means when it speaks of "straying after your heart and after your eyes,

following your own sinful desires.”

The moral sense, wrote James Q. Wilson, “is not a strong beacon light radiating outward to illuminate in sharp outline all that it touches.” It is, rather, “a small candle flame, casting vague and multiple shadows, flickering and sputtering in the strong winds of power and passion, greed and ideology.” He add: “But brought close to the heart” it “dispels the darkness and warms the soul.”[6]

Wittgenstein once said that “the work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders.”[7] In the case of Judaism the purpose of the outward signs – tsitsit, mezuzah and tefillin – is precisely that: to assemble reminders, on our clothes, our homes, our arms and head, that certain things are wrong, and that even if no other human being sees us, God sees us and will call us to account. We now have the empirical evidence that reminders make a significant difference to the way we act.

“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who shall know it?” said Jeremiah (Jer. 17: 9). One of the blessings and curses of human nature is that we use our power of reason not always and only to act rationally, but also to rationalize and make excuses for the things we do, even when we know we should not have done them. That, perhaps is one of the lessons the Torah wishes us to draw from the story of the spies. Had they recalled what God had done to Egypt, the mightiest empire of the ancient world, they would not have said, “We cannot attack those people; they are stronger than we are” (Num. 13: 31). But they were in the grip of fear. Strong emotion, fear especially, distorts our perception. It activates the amygdala, the source of our most primal reactions, causing it to override the prefrontal cortex that allows us to think rationally about the consequences of our decisions.

Tsitsit with their thread of blue remind us of heaven, and that is what we most need if we are consistently to act in accordance with the better angels of our nature.

[1] This and the following paragraphs are based on Ara Norenzayan, *Big Gods: How religion transformed cooperation and conflict*, Princeton University Press, 2013, 13-54.

[2] *Ibid.*, 39.

[3] *Menachot* 44a.

[4] He did not say these precise words, but said something similar in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).

[5] *Commentary to Berakhot*, introduction.

[6] James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense*, Free Press, 1993, 251.

[7] *Philosophical Investigations*, §127.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL **“And you will see it and you will remember all the Mitzvot of Hashem and you will do them” (15:39)**

The Mitzvah of Sisit is a Commandment which is categorized as an ‘Edut’, Testimony.

An Edut testifies to Historical events or great principles.

Since we can understand the Edut more easily, therefore they are more obligatory for us to do them. Principle: “Whatever is easier to do is more obligatory”.

Some examples of Edut are:

Matzah – to recall being slaves in Egypt.

Sisit – to remember the Mitzvot.

Mezuzah – reminds us that this is a Holy home given to us by Hashem.

Tefillin – reminds us that Hashem took us out of Egypt. And that the words of Torah should be on our lips.

Pesach – Yetziat Mitzrayim.

Shabbat – that Hashem created the world from nothing (ex nihilo).

The verse says that when we look at the Sisit we should remember all of the (613) Mitzvot. This would necessitate the knowledge of all the Mitzvot and include a special effort to perform. The Rabbis tell us, “If a person tries to do too much at one time he will not accomplish anything”. Therefore, when we gather the 4 Sisit every morning during the Shema prayer, lets try to think and ‘remember’ at least the following 4 Mitzvot which will fulfill 4 Commandments from our Torah.

1. “To gain fear/awareness of Hashem” – think that Hashem is looking at you. “Et Hashem Elokecha tira”
2. “To Love Hashem” – say, ‘I Love You Hashem’.
3. “To Thank Hashem” – Thank Him for Everything. “Veahabta Et Hashem Elokecha Bechal Lebabecha”
4. “To Love your fellow Jew & Jewish Nation” – Hashem created the world for Am Yisrael. “Beni Bechori Yisrael”.

We must listen to the testimony of the Edut as they were made in order to speak to us.

When you see ‘Sisit’, your neighbor’s or your own, remind yourself of the Mitzvot.

By thinking into the Edut/Testimonies of our Torah you will produce a diamond and a collection of gems in your mind which will give you pleasure in this world and in the next world forever.