This week’s Parsha indicts the Meraglim1 with slander and with the Land of Israel.2 From the narrative of the story, it is difficult to understand what the Torah sees in the report of the Meraglim to level such an accusation. Shlich opens with God’s command (Ex. 31:1) to Moshe to send the Meraglim. After enumerating those chosen for the mission, the Torah describes Moshe’s instructions to the Meraglim. “When Moshe sent them to scout the land of Canaan, he said to them, ‘Go up there into the Negev and on into the hill country, and see what kind of country it is. Are the people who dwell in it strong or weak, few or many? Is the country in which they dwell good or bad? Are the towns they live in open or fortified? Is the soil rich or poor? Is it wooded or not?“3  And take pains to bring back some of the fruit of the land...”4 And sure enough upon returning from their mission, they respond point-by-point to Moshe’s requests. “They went straight to Moshe and Aharon and all of Bnei Yisrael...and they made their report to them and to the whole congregation, and they showed them the fruit of the land. This is what they told him: ‘We came to the land you sent us to; it does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who inhabit the country are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large; moreover, we saw the offspring of the giants are there. Amalek dwells in the Negev region; the Chitti, Yevusi, and Emori inhabit the hill country; and the Canaanites dwell by the Sea and along the Jordan.”5 The chart below summarizes Moshe’s questions to the men sent into the land of Canaan and their responses aligned to demonstrate how they systematically answer all of Moshe’s inquiries.

And it is possible that the Meraglim’s response to Caleb’s words of encouragement, that none of the obstacles mentioned are insurmountable, was their failing. “But the men who had gone with him said, ‘We cannot attack those people, for it is too strong for us.’ Thus they spread calumnies among Bnei Yisrael about the land they had scouted, saying, ‘The land that we traversed and scouted is one that devours its inhabitants. All the people that we saw in it are men of great size...and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so we must have looked to them.”6 While their conclusions are negative, it is the same response that Moshe expects from the generation entering the land of Canaan when they encounter the cities and the people of Canaan. In addition, they were offering their assessment of the situation which they seemingly had the right to do.
Rashi indicates, based on the Gemara Sota, that their statement of “for it is too strong for us” was really a euphemism for the fact that the inhabitants of the land were too strong for God to deal with.9 The problem with this explanation is that the simple reading of the text is that Bnei Yisrael were not up to the task of facing-off against these people in a bid to conquer the land, but it does not make reference to God.10 The Ramban poses the question as to what was the failure of the Meraglim if they told the truth and faithfully responded to Moshe’s requests for information.11 He concludes that it revolves around the word “but (אֵֽפֶ֥ס)” that is mentioned in their description of that which they had witnessed on their mission. The word “Efes (אֵֽפֶ֥ס)” not only means “but”, but it also means “zero or nothing.” They were opining that in “no uncertain terms” can we successfully conquer the land which was not only an opinion about Bnei Yisrael’s capacity to wage war, but also a reflection of their belief that God was not up for the task either. This was only exacerbated by their later attempts to privately spread misinformation12 about the land in order to dissuade the people, at any cost, from any desire of attempting to enter the land because they were certain it would fail.13 That is what is stated later that their falsehoods about the land was the cause for their demise in a plague before God.14

While the Ramban points to “Efes (אֵֽפֶ֥ס)” as being the pivotal word in understanding the sin of the Meraglim, it would seem possible that there is another unique word that is utilized repetitively in the story of the Meraglim and which might shed some light on what went away with the Meraglim. Interestingly, the verb used to describe the mission of the Meraglim is “to happen upon” (לָהֶ֔ם). The verbTor (תּוּם) only appears in Tanach twenty-three times and thirteen of those instances are in Parshat Shlach. Of those thirteen, twelve of them are in reference to the Meraglim and one is in the context of the Parsha of Parshat Tzitzit. This might suggest that the employing of this word has some significance in understanding the problem surrounding the Meraglim, especially with regards to its manifestation in another instance in the Parsha.

One of the perplexing issues of the Parsha is why are all the Mitzvot that follow the sin of the Meraglim found in Parshat Shlach (the meal-offerings and libations, the Mitzva of Chala, the sin-offering, the story of the wood gatherer and the Mitzva of Tzitzit). With regards to the Mitzva of Tzitzit, Rashi, quoting Rav Moshe HaDarshan, suggests that at the tail-end of Parshat Shlach, the Torah aggregates a series of Mitzvot that are all equalled to any other Mitzva of the Torah (шедшוף כל המצות). For instance, the sin-offering mentioned is brought for unintentional violations of idol worship. Idol worship is considered to be such a fundamental Mitzva, that one’s violation of such a negative precept is considered to be a grievous misdeed. It is as if the person has denied God, the entire Torah and all the Mitzvot. Accordingly, Shabbat has a similar status in that one who violates the Shabbat is considered to be on par with an idol worshiper (אין 교طقה את שבת ע”י יער). And normatively he is actually deemed to have a similar standing. That is because Shabbat in Sefer Nechemya is equated to all the other Mitzvot of the Torah.16 The Mitzva of Tzitzit is then also found here because it too is equivalent to all the other Mitzvot of the Torah as it says “…and you will see it (the Tzitzit) and remember all the Mitzvot of God and perform them…”17 One can easily understand why the Mitzva of Shabbat and Avoda Zara would be deemed fundamental to the faith and therefore carry such a heavy weighting to the point that they would be on par with all the other Mitzvot of the Torah. On the other hand, why would the Mitzva of Tzitzit be included in that classification? Rashi, in what is considered by other commentaries to be a difficult explanation, suggests that it is based on the fact that Tzitzit is numerically equivalent (Gematria) to the number 613 (ץיתין=600+5 knots+8 strings=613) which is the total number of Mitzvot in the Torah.

The Gemara in Menachot, implicitly addressing this issue, quotes a Braitza that states, “Rabbi Mayer would query: Why is Techelet different from all other colors? Because Techelet is similar to the Sea and the Sea is similar to the sky, and the sky is the path of the true.”

16. The number of Mitzvot in the Torah.
17. This is a parable for the Torah. If we add the number 613 (ץיתין) to this number we get 618. This is the total number of Mitzvot in the Torah, I.e. the 613 Mitzvot of the Torah plus the 5 knots plus the 8 strings. This is a play on words as the Gemara is suggesting that the Mitzva of Tzitzit is so important that it is equal to all the other Mitzvot of the Torah.
similar to the firmament and the firmament is similar to the (God’s) throne of glory...” 18 Therefore, when one sees the Techelet string on their Tzitzit, they are reminded by association of God and their need to follow His commands. While seemingly far-fetched, this explanation speaks to the unique associative power of man to be able to see something and then imagine vistas far off and contemplate layers of ideas that derive or emanate from a simple sighting.

As noted above the verb Tor (תור) appears in the Mitzva of Tzitzit and this likely could be the explanation for the presence of the Mitzva of Tzitzit in Parshat Shlach and its connection to the Meraglim in the beginning of the Parsha. The Pasuk states that the reason for the Mitzva of Tzitzit is so that when one sees the Tzitzit they will remember all the Mitzvot of God and perform them “and not follow (תור) after your own heart and eyes which you stray after.” 17 The verb Tor (תור) means to “search, find or survey” and it is used in that manner earlier in Sefer Bamidbar when describing the first journey of the encampment from Har Sinai. “They traveled from the mountain of God a distance of three days. The Aron of God traveled in front of them, a distance of three days’ journey, to seek out (תור) a resting place for them.” 19 That means that the enjoinder of the Torah by Tzitzit, “not to follow (תור)” would be a demand not to “search or find.” Why would the Torah dictate such of an individual?

In the context of where this precept is found, one would have to look at the two halves of the verse as being contrasting demands. One should see the Tzitzit and remember all the Mitzvot, whereas one should not follow or stray (תור) after their heart and eyes. What does following or straying have to do with searching and finding? The truth is that which one sees is objective. On the other hand, the interpretation of that which one saw objectively is very subjective. The Torah is indicating that one can physically see the Techelet string on the Tzitzit, but what that sighting means can vary vastly from person to person. One can simply see a color-dyed string or they can see God’s throne of glory – it all depends on the person’s interpretation of what they are seeing and experiencing. Similarly, one’s eyes can also see something objective that precipitates their heart to generate all sorts of personal emotions and thoughts about that which was just seen. It speaks to man’s ability through that which they experience and see to unleash tremendous powers of creativity, building and sanctifying, but that same capacity can lead to machinations of destruction, selfishness and defiling. Addressing this interpretive capability, the Torah provides, in the Parsha of Tzitzit, a guide for the individual to manage that aptitude. When a person sees something, it needs to be seen through the prism of a Techelet string reminding one of God and all the Mitzvot and not through a sighting that causes the individual to stray. The exercise of inculcating inputs through the prism of the individual’s filters that leads to a result far from the raw inputs is called Latur (לתר) – it can lead one to follow which God demands of the individual (תור) or it can cause them to stray (לתר). In the end, which of those outcomes is realized is determined by the foundation laid to facilitate one’s interpretive abilities.

Now looking back at the Meraglim with that perspective, the verb Tor (תור), perfectly captures and explains the problem of the Meraglim. As noted above, that which the Meraglim saw and reported was accurate and is corroborated by Moshe’s description of the land, people and cities of Cana’an in Sefer Devarim. The only question is how is that information processed (תור). Moshe states that it should lead one to the inescapable conclusion that only God, and following God’s laws and ways, can lead them to victory since there is no logical or natural way that Bnei Yisrael should be successful in a military campaign.20 On the other hand, the Meraglim saw the same inputs and came to the opposite conclusion; there is no way that even God could successfully enable their conquest of the land. The deduction of the Meraglim was clearly erroneous for two reasons. Firstly, they did not “see” God’s throne of glory when they saw a string of Techelet or in essence they could not intuit that if God had promised them the land of Cana’an and was leading them there then He would certainly facilitate its happening no matter how difficult; as the verse says at the conclusion of the Parsha of Tzitzit, “I am God, your Lord, who took you out of Egypt.” 21 – nothing is beyond Me. In addition, they began to fabricate information in order to support their conclusion which was a “violation” of “not straying after your eyes and heart.” That is why the demand of their mission was V’Yaturu (יתרון), process and reach the correct conclusions from that which you will see.

In the end, the Tzitzit are the antidote to the Meraglim. It is a reminder that we experience so many things in our life, but their meaning is all in the perspective that we bring to bear. The proper frame of mind and attitude should be governed by the Torah and all the Mitzvot of God. We need to see thrones of glory, not blue strings; we need to avoid straying after our eyes and hearts and instead successfully reach those places of Menucha that the Aron found.

Shabbat Shalom

---

18 אֱ-תָת֜וּרוּלֹֽו אֲנִי יָמִ֑ים לָהֶ֖ם מַהֵר לְפָנֶ֗י יְקֹוָ֔ק מְנוּחָֽה אֵשׁ לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וֹן וְיָדַעְתָּ אֱ-לֹֽקֵיכֶ֗ם אֲשֶׁ֨ר מֵאֶ֣רֶץ מַהֵר אֲנִי לָ֖הֶם תַּנְיָה אֱ-לֹֽקֵיכֶ֗ם וְהוּא לָכֶ֖ם לְפָנֶ֗י אֱ-לֹֽקֵיכֶ֗ם מֵאֶ֣רֶץ מַהֵר לָהֶ֖ם מַהֵר אֱ-לֹֽקֵיכֶ֗ם לָהֶ֖ם שְׁלֹ֣שֶׁת יָמִ֑ים שְׁלֹ֣שֶׁת יָמִ֑ים וַאֲר֨וֹן וְיָדַעְתָּ אֱ-לֹֽקֵיכֶ֗ם (משה (ע))
19」とトク（アリ）は肉を食べ、食べた後に汗の流れがあり、その肉を食べる者には怒りを示す。カタクリの葉を食べる者には怒りを示す。
20 יָמִ֑ים לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וֹן אֹהְלֹֽו אֲנִי יָמִ֑ים לָהֶ֖ם מַהֵר לְפָנֶ֗י יְקֹוָ֔ק מְנוּחָֽה אֵשׁ לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וֹן וְיָדַעְתָּ אֱ-לֹֽקֵיכֶ֗ם אֲשֶׁ֨ר מֵאֶ֣רֶץ מַהֵר אֲנִי לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וֹן אֹהְלֹֽו אֲנִי יָמִ֑ים לָהֶ֖ם מַהֵר לְפָנֶ֗י יְקֹוָ֔ק מְנוּחָֽה אֵשׁ לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וֹן וְיָדַעְתָּ אֱ-לֹֽקֵיכֶ֗remium אֲשֶׁ֨ר מֵאֶ֣רֶץ מַהֵר אֲנִי לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וֹן וְיָדַעְתָּ אֱ-לֹֽקֵיכֶ֗remium אֲשֶׁ֨ר מֵאֶ֣רֶץ מַהֵר אֲנִי לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וֹן אֹהְלֹֽו אֲנִי יָמִ֑ים לָהֶ֖ם מַהֵר לְפָנֶ֗י יְקֹוָ֔ק מְנוּחָֽה אֵשׁ לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וֹן וְיָדַעְתָּ אֱ-לֹֽקֵיכֶ֗premium (משה (ע))
21 יָמִ֑ים לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וֹן אֹהְלֹֽו אֲנִי יָמִ֑ים לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וֹן אֹהְלֹֽו אֲנִי יָמִ֑ים לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וְיָם אֲנִי יָמִ֑ים לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וְיָם אֲנִי יָמִ֑ים לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וְיָם אֲנִי יָמִ֑ים לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וְיָם אֲנִי יָמִ֑ים לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וְיָם אֲנִי יָמִ֑ים לָ֖ם וַאֲר֨וְיָם אֲנִי יָמִ֑ים Latur (לתר)