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In general, the news we consume has a significant negativity bias, and this is especially true when it comes to reports from Israel. Whether the bad reports are coming from biased international media sources, media sources closer to home, or NGOs (who should know better) peddling Israel's failures in order to fundraise for their own solutions/activities, we are regularly exposed to selective news reports which highlight Israel's imperfections and challenges.

Reading Parshat Shelach Lecha reminds us of our responsibility to be incredibly careful about how we talk about Israel, and of the damaging results of failing to do so.

I have recently signed up to "Israel's Good News Newsletter", a weekly email bulletin of good news from Israel, collated by Michael Ordman. For example, this week's newsletter (14 July) includes the following stories:

The trial of a new in-heart microcomputer has already saved a patient's life. A newborn Syrian baby has been flown to Israel for urgent heart surgery. A powerful Israeli microscope displays the flow of light and electricity. Israeli scientists have generated clean fuel hydrogen from plants. Israel's startup ecosystem is number 3 in the world. An Israeli singer in the IDF has been signed up by Atlantic records. Applications for immigration to Israel are at an all-time high.

As Yehoshua and Calev declared in this week's Parsha: "טובה הארץ מאד מאד" – "The Land is very, very good", and we should never allow negative reports to distort our appreciation of our Land. In that spirit, our Seudah Shlishit guest speaker this week is our very own Debbie Nossbaum, reporting from Yerushalayim. As Debbie describes, her visit to Israel with Robbie has been very different from the one they planned. Yet despite all the challenges along the way, Debbie encapsulates the great beauty of our Land – a timely read for Parshat Shelach Lecha.

Shabbat Shalom

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Another week has gone by and sadly more Victorians are affected by Covid but Baruch HaShem, I'm unaware of any outbreak in our Mizrahi Yavneh community.

Our shul services are well supported, and whilst many shuls remain shuttered, our shul at Yavneh, the Elsternwick Jewish Community will reopen next Shabbat.

Travelling down memory lane, we effectively demolished the interior of the convent of the Star of the Sea College we had purchased in 1988 to relocate Yavneh College. Ron Goldschlager managed the specific construction project to establish the Fay Rockman Synagogue in 1991, which offered an alternative area for orthodox people to live, with a shul in their midst. So, the EJC is in its 30th year of successful operation.

Over the last few weeks, EJC Rabbi Mark Steiner has conducted a very well supported weekly zoom series of shiurim with his predecessors - Rabbis Jack Engel, Michael Fredman, Mordechai Gutnick, Yisroel Sufrin and Chaim Cowen each presenting a shiur.

In his shiur, Av Melbourne Bet Din Rabbi Gutnick explained aspects of conversion conducted by MBD. It reminded me of the important work done by MBD, which is in turn funded by the Council of Orthodox Synagogues. Notwithstanding our lockdown era, it's apposite to recognise the ongoing commitment of these two organisations servicing the Melbourne Jewish Community Rabbi Gutnick described many recent advances made by the MBD, which I'm proud to say is based in our Mizrahi campus.

The COSV also funds Melbourne Eruv which is administered by Mizrahi and the COSV. Unfortunately, there are several congregations and shtiebelach that do not meet their funding commitments to COSV. Nevertheless, we at Mizrahi remain committed to maintaining the Eruv for the benefit of the entire community.

I'm delighted to report that we will soon commence the northern expansion of the Eruv including Malvern and Armadale, which will enable easier visits over Dandenong Rd, to Cabrini Hospital and Malvern Chabad in particular. Our management of Melbourne Eruv and Kosher Australia team continue to make Melbourne one of the premier locations in the world for an orthodox Jewish lifestyle.

This week's parsha Shelach details the names of the tribal leaders sent to spy out Canaan. Other than Yehoshua and Calev, the 10 Spies brought back bad reports of Israel. My late father Erwin Lamm z'l noted, that as a consequence of their Diba Ra'ah, the names of the 10 spies disappeared from Jewish history. Further the consequence of AmYisrael's subsequent rejection of Israel led to a punishment of another 38 years in the wilderness. We are charged with seeing the best of Israel,

of viewing our Jewish lives optimistically and extolling those who have and who continue to contribute to our community, to Israel and our people.

Wishing all a Shabbat Shalom and a Chodesh Tov



Rabbi Mirvis

"And Moshe sent them to spy the Land of Canaan, and he said to them, 'Go up from the south and climb the mountain. And you shall see the Land – how is it? And the people that dwells on it – is it strong or weak? Is it few or numerous? And what about the Land on which it dwells – is it good or bad? And what about the cities in which it dwells – are they open or fortified?'" (Bemidbar 13:17-19).

As the 12 spies prepared to embark on their mission, Moshe assigned them a list of criteria by which to evaluate the Land and its inhabitants. One of the criteria concerned the layout of the cities: "Are they open or fortified?" At first glance, Moshe's intention is unclear. If a city is surrounded by walls, is that a sign of strength or weakness?

From the negative report which 10 of the spies gave upon their return, it is clear that they saw fortification as a sign of strength:

"But the people that dwells in the Land is powerful, and the cities are fortified and very great, and we also saw offspring of the giant there" (Bemidbar 13:24).

According to the spies, the walls around the cities would make it difficult for the Israelites to conquer their inhabitants. However, Rashi explains that Moshe's intention was the exact opposite of what the spies understood:

"He (Moshe) gave them a sign: If they dwell in open cities they are strong, for they rely on their strength, but if they dwell in fortified cities they are weak" (Rashi, Bemidbar 13:18).

Moshe saw fortification as a sign of vulnerability. If the inhabitants of Canaan needed to protect themselves by surrounding themselves with walls, it is a sign that they could not rely on their own strength and could easily be conquered.

This discussion about walls can be applied to our lives as Jews today. The modern world offers endless temptations, distractions and challenges to those who wish to remain true to their faith. As a result, there may be a need to erect certain "walls" between ourselves and the lurking dangers of the outside world.

At the same time, while walls can be a source of strength, they can also be a sign of weakness. Somebody brought up behind walls will find it much harder to defend him/herself when faced with the realities of the outside world. If we can succeed in remaining true to our faith whilst engaging with the modern world, despite the dangers entailed, we will be much stronger Jews as a result.

Through awareness of the vulnerability of living with fewer walls, may we only go from strength to strength.



R' Leor Broh

Riddle for Parshat Shelach Lecha

Find 4 consecutive words that have as their end letters, the letters of Hashem's ineffable Name (Yud -Kei- Vav Kei) in the reverse order.

Answer to Last Week's Riddle (Behaalotcha)

I am an inanimate object appearing only twice in the Torah. Once in Parshat Shmot, and once in Behaalotcha. On both occasions I am associated with something negative. What am I?

The answer is "snow".

It appears in Behaalotcha 12:10 when Miriam turns gets Tzaraat "like snow" "והנה מרים מצרעת כשלג" "כשלג". It also appears in Shmot 4:6 when Moshe's hand gets Tzaraat "like snow" "והנה ידו מצרעת כשלג".

NB Snow occurs many times in Nach, but unlike in Torah, rarely in association with Tzaraat.

**DERASHA
NOTES**

Excerpt from Rabbi Mirvis' Derasha in Beit Yehuda 5779

Today I would like to briefly focus, not on the meraglim in this week's Parsha, but the meraglim in this week's Haftarah.

Our Haftarah is from the beginning of the book of Yehoshua, when Yehoshua is about to lead us into the Land of Israel.

And the Haftarah commences:

יהושע פרק ב פסוק א
וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּנֵי-נֹון מִן-הַשְּׂטִיִּים שְׁנַיִם-אָנָשִׁים מֵרְגָלִים חָרָשׁ לֵאמֹר לְכוּ רְאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת-יְרִיחוֹ...

And Yehoshua bin Nun sent twelve men spying from Shittim, silently, saying, "Go, see the land and Yericho..."

While their mission was successful and soon after we entered the Land, we need to ask, what was Yehoshua thinking?

This is the very same Yehoshua who in this week's Parsha tried to stand up against the 10 bad spies who delivered a negative report about the Land of Israel, but failed to win over popular opinion.

Yehoshua, more than anyone else, should have been aware of the dangers of sending spies into the Land, and the terrible consequences which followed – an entire generation passed away in the desert and never reached the Land of Israel.

What was he doing, so early in his leadership, taking such a huge risk?

I believe an answer to this question appears in one at the beginning of the Haftarah. And that is the word חרש

... וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּנֵי-נֹון מִן-הַשְּׂטִיִּים שְׁנַיִם-אָנָשִׁים מֵרְגָלִים חָרָשׁ ...

Q :What does it mean that these spies were **silent**?

Surely all spies are as silent and secretive as they can be about their true identity and their true mission. I doubt the Meraglim of this week's Parsha were going around the Land trying to draw attention to themselves.

A: We can explain that חרש is not a description of how they behaved while they were on their mission, but a description of how they were sent and how they returned.

As opposed to this week's Parsha, which commences with the announcement of the prominent representatives of each tribe, described as

ראשים (heads/leaders) נשיאים (princes) אנשים (great men)

In the Haftarah, we do not even know the names of the spies.

Whereas in this week's Parsha the spies returned and announced their report to the whole of Am Yisrael, In the Haftarah, they report back directly to Moshe.

The mission of the Haftarah was חרש - It was understated and discreet without the fanfare of Shelach Lecha

And so it was a great success at that time, and a model for future success.

As the Midrash tells us:

במדבר רבה (וילנא) פרשת שלח פרשה טז
 שאין לך חביב לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא כשליח שמשתלח לעשות מצוה ונותן נפשו כדי שיצליח בשליחתו ואין
 לך בני אדם שנשתלחו לעשות מצוה ונותנין נפשם להצליח בשליחותן כאותם שנים ששלח יהושע בן נון

There is nothing as beloved before HaKadosh Baruch Hu as a messenger who is sent to perform a Mitzva and gives of himself in order to succeed in his mission. And there is nobody who has been sent to perform a Mitzva and given of themselves in order to succeed in their mission like those twelve who were sent by Yehoshua bin Nun.

There is nothing Hashem loves more than people who work on behalf of the community, give of themselves for others, and get the job done.



R' James Kennard

Rashi opens his commentary on the parasha of Shelach Lecha by asking about a connection with the conclusion of the previous sedra.

Last week's parasha finished with the words:

וַתִּסְגֹּר מִרְיָם מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וְהָעָם לֹא נָסַע עַד הָאָסֶף מִרְיָם:
 וְאַחַר נָסְעוּ הָעָם מִחֲצָרוֹת וַיִּחַנוּ בְּמִדְבַר פָּאָרָן:

Miriam was shut up (afflicted with tazara'at, punished for speaking l'shon hara about Moshe) outside of the camp seven days, and the people did not travel until Miriam was brought in again.

Afterwards, the people journeyed from Hazerot, and camped in Midbar Paran. (Bemidbar 12:15-16).

Shelecha Lecha commences with:

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר. שְׁלַח לְךָ אַנְשִׁים וַיִּתְּרוּ אֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן . . .

Hashem spoke to Moses, saying, "Send men, that they may spy out the land of Canaan . . ." (Bemidbar 13:1-2)

Rashi asks

למה נסמכה פרשת מרגלים לפ מרים? לפי שלקתה על עסקי דבה שדברה באחיה ורשעים הללו
 ראו ולא לקחו מוסר:

Why is the parasha of the spies (who reported negatively on the land of Israel) juxtaposed to the parasha of Miriam? Because she was stricken over matters of speech when she spoke against her brother, yet these wicked people (the spies) saw and they did not take a lesson. (Rashi on Bemidbar 13:2)

This question - of the juxtaposition of different sections of the Torah ("סמיכות פרשיות") - is asked by Rashi in various places in the Chumash. Yet on most occasions when one section follows another, Rashi feels no need to raise the issue. The commentators explain that Rashi, true to his declared mission of explaining the פשט - the simple meaning of the text - (see his comment on Bereishit 3:8) only asks about סמיכות פרשיות when the juxtaposition is itself problematic, i.e. when we would not have expected the two sections to be placed next to each other.

What therefore is the problem with the incident of the spies immediately following the episode of Miriam's improper speech? Why can we not assume that one is written immediately after the other because one occurred immediately after the other?

Rav Eliyahu **Mizrachi** (15th century Turkey), often considered to be the foremost commentator on Rashi, explains that Rashi believes that these sections are not listed chronologically. The conclusion of the Miriam narrative records that the people journeyed from Hazeret and then camped in Midbar Paran (Bemidbar 12:16). Paran was the site from where the spies were sent (Bemidbar 13:3) but Rashi himself in his comment on Devarim 1:1 says that Hazeret was the location of Korach's rebellion.

Putting these pieces together, the geography informs the chronology and tells us that Korach's rebellion took place between the Miriam incident and before the sending of the spies, yet it is described in Bemidbar 16, *after* the spies in Bemidbar 13. Thus the Torah should *not* have recorded the story of the spies immediately after Miriam - hence the question of why did it do so. The **Maharal of Prague** (16th century) disagrees. The last words of last week's parasha are "they camped in Midbar Paran" and therefore the sending of the spies, who departed from Midbar Paran, is absolutely the next event chronologically (and the Maharal disputes the Mizrachi's dating of Korach's rebellion). Therefore the question returns: why does Rashi ask about the juxtaposition?

The Maharal quotes others who say that Rashi's question is predicated on the Torah's aversion to putting two episodes of punishment adjacent to each other (implied by Rashi on Bemidbar 10:35), which would then justify the question of why the punishment of Miriam is listed immediately before the story of the spies and the subsequent punishment of the nation. But this is rejected, since there are other examples of such juxtaposition - e.g. the punishment of the complainers in Bemidbar 11 is followed by the consequence of Miriam's action in Bemidbar 12 - without Rashi raising an objection. Indeed the Maharal concludes that it is only two communal punishments that are kept apart; Miriam was a case of an individual affliction.

The Maharal's own explanation of what drives Rashi's comment is one odd word in Bemidbar 12:13. After describing how Miriam recovered from her tzara'at, the verse states "וְאַחַר נָסְעוּ הָעָם וַיֵּצְאוּ מִן־הַחֲזֵרֹת וַיִּחַנוּ בְּמִדְבַּר פָּאֲרָן" - "afterwards, the people journeyed from Hazeret and they camped in Midbar Paran". Why does it add "וְאַחַר" - "afterwards"? Surely this must be to stress that the spies were sent *immediately* after the incident with Miriam (see also Rashi on Bereishit 15:1). Rashi's

question therefore is why does the Torah stress this immediacy when recording that the spies followed on from the Miriam episode.

Another commentary on Rashi, the **Sefer Hazikaron** (Rabbi Avraham HaLevi Bakrat, 15th century Spain), breaks with the consensus in the way in which he understands Rashi's question. According to this view, Rashi is not asking why the two incidents are *written* next to each other, but why they *occurred* one after the other. Why did Hashem wait until after Miriam had been punished before commanding Moshe to select and send spies?

With this understanding of the question, the implication of the answer changes. The juxtaposition of the two incidents tells us not that Hashem deliberately wrote the Torah in a way to highlight the moral failings of the spies, but rather that Hashem tried to guide the spies in the right direction, by ensuring that they would have the lesson of Miriam's punishment for speaking l'shon ha'ra from which to learn. In this way Hashem would encourage them not to make a similar mistake when reporting about the land. Alas, as Rashi concludes, they failed to learn this lesson.

This interpretation is perhaps bolstered by Rashi's wording, condemning the spies because "ולא ליקחו מוסר" - "they did not learn". This phrase does not appear in the midrashim that serve as Rashi's sources but is one that he himself quoted from Yirmiyahu 7:28, where it describes people who refuse to heed Hashem's word. We can suppose that Rashi is stressing that the spies were spurning the teaching that Hashem was deliberately giving them in the form of Miriam's example, as the Sefer Hazikaron is suggesting.

As we have seen, Rashi's question is subject to extensive interpretation; so too is Rashi's answer. **Rav Soloveitchik** (20th century America) learns that the comparison between the failing of Miriam and the sin of the spies is deeper than simply the occurrence of l'shon hara - defamatory speech. He describes both Moshe (the subject of Miriam's words) and the land of Israel (about which the spies spoke) as possessing a "segulah element", meaning that they were each unique. Moshe's level of prophecy was incompatible with that of any other prophet (including Miriam herself) and the land of Israel is qualitatively different from any other place.

Miriam had overlooked the segulah element in Moses, and they overlooked the segulah element in the land. Miriam ignored the chosenness of her brother Moses his numinous character and charisma. The spies, likewise, could not grasp the secret of a segulah land and its unique metaphysical relationship to the people. There was a common denominator in the two episodes, in her protest against Moses and in their report submitted to Moses. The element of segulah was absent from both. (Vision and Leadership, pp. 185-186)

Miriam criticised Moshe because she compared him to other prophets. The spies concluded that Israel could not be conquered because they judged it by the same criteria that applied to any other land. This was their mistake; Israel is unique. Its conquest and the subsequent thriving and surviving of the Jewish kingdom can only be explained in the light of Hashem's protection. And so it is today.



Debbie Nossbaum

It all began around the time of our grandson Daniel's barmitzvah.

We were planning to leave for Israel a few days after the barmitzvah, but with all the busyness of moving house, having kids from overseas and the actual simcha, we didn't pay that much notice to all the changes in our flight schedule. Every day there would be another email of a flight cancellation or change in our itinerary.

We eventually flew via Bangkok and already then people were wearing masks in the airport and there was a feeling of discomfort and unknown.

That feeling was quickly forgotten once we got to Israel. Robbie went off to do the shvil hike and I spent my time catching up with family, friends, the Kotel, Matan, the Israel Museum etc. Even Purim was still OK - we heard Megillah at night in a private home with lots of people very close together. In the morning I went to Matan women's Megillah reading and we had a Seudah in someone's house.

We were scheduled to leave Sunday after Purim, but by that time, all the Asian airports were closed, all our flights had been cancelled and, eventually, the flight we were offered was via LA. We decided that we didn't want to expose ourselves to two such long flights, so we decided not to take them and to wait a bit longer. By that time we had moved into our own apartment, so we were very comfortable and loved being there. We also had lots of things to finish off, so this would be a good opportunity.

Within a week, things had changed drastically. Schools and shules were closed, places of entertainment, the malls, offices, shops except those selling food or pharmaceuticals were all shut down. We could only go 100m from our home! Overnight, we had to rethink what we were doing. I felt like I was in "Room" (the book by Emma Donoghue) so I needed to have a schedule. I even drew up a timetable. I began by enrolling in 5 Matan courses which started at 9am every morning. And then everyone was Zooming. You could be busy the whole day with shiurim, lectures, exercise classes even virtual tours. I spent a lot of time on the iPad!

Exercise was really important but became a bit harder. We live on the 4th (top) floor of our building, so going up and down the stairs became a part of our regime. The aim was to do it at least 10 times a day. Outside, we literally walked back and forth 100m! One day while I was talking to a friend on the phone, I clocked up 5km!

We got a TV, which we haven't even watched much, but I was excited to make Yoga blocks out of the foam that the TV was packed in. We were really busy on the phone - the mornings were spent

on calls to Australia, and by the time Australia was finished it was time for America! The WhatsApp groups were going crazy, but, at least, we were able to keep in touch with everyone.

We were allowed to go to the supermarket the whole time, even though we tried not to, but there were never any shortages - the shelves, including toilet paper, were always fully stocked. The only time there was a shortage was eggs before Pesach, but by Chol Hamoed they were back.

There was a feeling of camaraderie on the street. One day I heard music in the street, so I walked around the corner and there was a portable stage on a truck with a singer and musicians getting people to come out on their balconies and enjoy the music. They went from suburb to suburb. You felt that the municipality was really trying to do something to keep people in good spirits.

Then Pesach was coming.... there were a lot of restrictions. We got deliveries where possible and I missed not being able to see the regular Pesach selection of product. We had ordered some cooked food, but the provider didn't know if she'd be able to get the food to us because neighbourhoods were being closed off. You couldn't travel from one neighbourhood to the next. Other people had to deliver a day early not knowing if they'd be able to get out. Police were stopping people. It was against the law to burn chametz. The rabbis had to make new rulings. Chametz can be flushed down the toilet. No need to dispose of bread, rather sell it and keep it for after Chag to minimise going out. But despite all the restrictions, there were moments of joy.

Just like in Melbourne, families couldn't be together for Seder, but at 8pm on Seder night, people came out on their balconies to sing Ma Nishtana together. It was an unreal moment of achdut - with that small gesture people didn't feel alone. We were all in this together. You felt that the government cared about people and tried to make things easier. On Yom HaShoah they made sure that when the siren went, every Holocaust survivor was visited by a volunteer with a pot plant as a gift. The siren here is very powerful. Even stuck at home, we went out on the balcony just to feel part of it.

On Yom Haazmaut and on Yom Yerushalayim there was a van playing music going up, and down the streets. The first Friday night after Pesach, we were about to start davening, when we heard davening outside. We went on to the balcony and there was a minyan! Some people were on the street and others on their balconies. It was so special to hear everyone singing together. I loved being able to go the "shule" on Shabbat morning on the balcony and especially to have birkat cohanim twice! (In Israel there is Birkat cohanim every morning and twice on Shabbat). The minyan lasted quite a few weeks. Shabbat morning stopped when there was a minyan with a Sefer Torah further down the street and then Friday night stopped when the Shules started to open. The minyan down the street is still going and has a microphone during the week. That way people can remain in their homes and still hear.

One Shabbat morning we went for a walk and there seemed to be a minyan on every block - the sound of tefillah filled the air. On Yom Haazmaut and on Yom Yerushalayim we had beautiful tefillah right here, even with the shofar blast. Robbie now goes to an outdoor minyan in someone's garden where they all wear masks and socially distance. I went for the first time on Shavuot - I hadn't realised how much I had missed being in shule, listening to kriyat hatorah and singing along. Still miss a speech but will look forward to that when we get home.

Even though I'm sure many of our experiences are similar to those everywhere, there's a different feeling being in Israel. A feeling of belonging and everyone being there for each other. People

kept positive and upbeat. The cycle of the Jewish year continues and you feel it in the air. After Pesach the Israeli flags start to go up on people's houses and on the cars - they stay till after Yom Yerushalayim. Sari has fruit trees in her garden so we were able to make birkat ha' ilanot - a bracha unique to Israel which can only be recited during the month of Nissan and is made on the first blossoms of the fruit trees. While we were cocooned inside we were able to watch nature continuing outside - there are flowers blooming everywhere, the trees have all their leaves and now we're eating the cherries from Sari's tree!!

Friday really feels like erev Shabbat - everything closes early, the traffic dies down by late afternoon and there are flower sellers on every corner. In the morning our outdoor furniture is wet with dew and I understand why even nusach ashkenaz says "morid ha'tal" here in Israel. In Melbourne, I've had an electrician with a kippa and maybe a plumber, but when you even see a rubbish collector here wearing a kippa, you know you're in the right place for a Jewish person to be.

We wake up every morning, go out to our balcony with a spectacular view towards Har Herzl and say "another beautiful day in Jerusalem". It feels good to be here despite all the restrictions. Now that things are opening up, we can now walk wherever we want, have been able to go away for a weekend, even had a meal in a restaurant. We went back to the Kotel - it had been closed off for weeks and is now all divided into small sections. It was sad to see it so empty, but nice to have it almost all to ourselves. Life is slowly returning albeit wearing masks and keeping distancing. Even though the Covid numbers have spiked a bit, we still feel safe here and have felt safe the whole time. We've missed being able to socialise, but we'll catch up next time.

This week in Melbourne is parshat Shelach (we read it here last week) - I feel that we came "latur et haaretz", but we saw that it was all good! Israelis are giants in so many ways, the land truly flows with milk & honey, and her fruits are plentiful.

Am Yisrael Chai!