

# Divrei Jeshurun

Parshat Shelach 5761

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## Statistics: Shelach

- ❖ 37th of the 54 Torah portions
- ❖ 4th of 10 in Bemidbar
- ❖ Written on 198 lines in a Sefer Torah -- ranks 25th in the Torah
- ❖ 10 parshiyot; 7 open, 3 closed
- ❖ 119 verses - ranks 21st (6th in Bemidbar)
- ❖ 1540 words - ranks 27th (5th in Bemidbar)
- ❖ 5820 letters - ranks 27th (4th in Bemidbar)
- ❖ Shelach contains 3 of the 613 mitzvot according to the *Sefer ha-Hinukh* - 2 positive & 1 negative (*see chart*)

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## Halakha in the Parsha: Halakha Chart

The following is a listing of the commandments in this week's parsha. The first column is a simple ordinal listing within the parsha. The next column lists each mitzva relative to the total of 613. The next column states whether the command is positive or negative. The last column is where the command is listed in Numbers.

#	613	☺	Command	Num.
1	385	P	How to separate Hallah from dough (and give it to a <i>Kohen</i> )	15:20
2	386	P	To affix and wear <i>tzitzit</i> on a four-cornered garment	15:38
3	387	N	Not to stray after the temptations of the mind and/or eye	15:39

## Halakha Insight: Them Cheatin' Eyes

Tucked amongst the laws of the Torah lies Mitzvah #387 - the prohibition of having naughty thoughts. (See chart above)

"Naughty" is defined by the Sages as: (1) anything not directed towards God and the Torah, or (2) directed towards destructive self-gratification.

Like the prohibition against coveting (#38), this command appears to be an exercise in Orwellian *thoughtcrime*. It is a law that is frightening in scope, ripe for abuse, and either impossible to enforce or all too easy.

Yet it is this last factor, the enforcement, that can mitigate the fear we feel.

As Modern Orthodox Jews, we are torn between the devotional desire to follow God's Way and the modernist desire to preserve personal freedom. The tension of these two desires defines the sociological and psychological life of the Modern Orthodox Jew. For while our Orthodox genes drive us towards a devotion to the Will of God, modernity teaches us to be wary of those who will define and force that Will upon others.

(over please)

## Insight in the Parsha: God of Constant Sorrow

The sin of the Spies is the worst thing that the Jews did to God, ever. The Sages report on the verse "And the people cried that night" (**Numbers 14:1**) that:

Rabbah ben R'Yochanan said "That was the night of the Ninth of Av. The Holy One Blessed Be He said to them: 'Because you have cried in vain, I shall furnish you with a crying for all generations!" (**TB Taanit 29a**)

The Ninth of Av was decreed by God to be a day of national calamity and mourning until the time of the Messiah, all because of the Spies. Why is this sin the worst -- especially in comparison to the Golden Calf?

The relationship between God and Israel is often described as one between husband and wife (cf. the Haftarah of Bemidbar, **Hosea 2:18-22**). Using this metaphor, the sin of the Golden Calf (idol worship) is considered akin to adultery. This is a major crime but, psychologically, the sin is considered one of lust; a momentary straying from the marital couch.

The sin of the spies demonstrates an infidelity of a much more severe level. Rabbi Mark Smilowitz describes the sin of the spies as that of a complete loss of trust between God and Israel. By crying vainly, Israel stated that they did not think God would protect them or fulfill any promises of the covenant. That utter loss of trust is an irreconcilable rift between husband and wife -- and why the sin of the spies haunts us to this day.

# Ha-Amek Jeshurun - Deeper Analysis

## Halakha Insight: Them Cheatin' Eyes (continued)

A hallmark of Modernity is a distrust for the instruments of authority and even of government. The distrust is either an inherent antipathy for the concept of the instruments of mass will, or merely a long memory of the past abuses of that mass will.

The "mass will" can be either a government or a mob; both are frightening in the eyes of a Modernist. This appeal to individuality -- to believe in the primacy of every individual opinion -- can often lead to a rejection of wisdom and morality. To some, the preservation of individual liberty is worth that price. This week's execution of the Oklahoma City Terrorist demonstrates the battle of all these Modernist ideas. The terrorist believed that government infringed on personal liberty and therefore was evil. This philosophy is a spawn of Modern thought; and while it is taken to an absurd extreme, the connections are there.

All of these elements are present in the battle between God and the Spies. The Spies slander is just one example of the litany of rebellion that occurred in the desert wandering. God commands and promises the conquest of Canaan, and somehow the people believe that God's word isn't good enough. It is absolutely absurd that people would listen to 10 mortals as opposed to God. The people witnessed the Words and Deeds of God: the miracles of the Sea and the Plagues and the Revelation of Sinai. What more could possibly be necessary to get the people to listen?

Rather, the word of men dominated the Word of God. The sin is one of "straying after the eyes" -- of listening to individual lust as opposed to the word of God. We see this in the language of the punishment for the Spies' sin, and in the command of *tzitzit*, the command meant to protect us from further infractions.

God states:

According to the number of days that they toured the land, 40 days, a day a year a day a year they shall bear their iniquity 40 years; and they will know what it means to thwart me (Numbers 14:34).

The same verb, *la-tur*, to tour/seek is used for the command of *tzitzit*:

It will be for you fringes [*tzitzit*], and you will see them, and remember all the commands of God, and do them, and not tour after your hearts and after your eyes, that which you lust after." (Numbers 15:39).

To stray after the eyes & heart means to directly reject the path of God in favor of self-gratification. This sin is primeval, it is the sin of the Garden of Eden. It is most basic and most far-reaching. And it is a sin to which we children of the Modern Mind are particularly susceptible.

This is where Command #387 comes in. We are commanded to not harbor naughty thoughts or pursue after lusts of the mind. As modernists we fear the abuse to which this command can lead, especially since the command can be applied to almost everything that Modern Orthodoxy tries to introduce into how we define the path of God.

What saves the command from possible abuse is that the practice and enforcement of the law falls squarely on the individual. Only God is privy to the privacy of our hearts, and it is only to God that we answer for this command. In that sense, the thoughtcrime falls under the general command to be Holy. Holiness demands a scrutiny of thought as well as of action. But that scrutiny, the enforcement, is for the individual. To thine own self be true.