

D'var Torah for Shelach Lecha – Out of the House of Bond... (James Bond)  
June 17, 2023; Congregation Sinai, San José, CA  
Doug Brook

Shabbat Shalom. In recognition of Hebrew going from right to left, let's look at this week's parshah from end to beginning.

The end of this week's exciting episode includes, as you just heard – twice, in fact, since it was the maftir reading – one of the Torah's greatest hits. The original text commanding that Jews wear tzitzit rose up the charts all the way to number three in the paragraphs of the Shema. So, you actually heard it three times today, if you were also here to hear it during Shacharit.

The tzitzit are the loose threads hanging on the four corners of four-cornered garments – this is because it's difficult to tie them to all four corners of a three-cornered garment. Officially, the tzitzit are ever-present to remind us of all the mitzvot that we were commanded, though symbolically they can also represent how there are always loose threads to handle. While getting bitten by a tsetse fly can get you the sleeping sickness, the worst side effect of wearing tzitzit is sleeping during the sermon. Finally, the tzitzit also serve well to remind us that, while there were approximately two million Israelites in the desert, we were destined to spend eternity, on a global scale, as a fringe group.

You think I'm kidding about most of that. I am. But there's a thread of truth in each thing I said. Think about that while I mention that, earlier, the parshah talks about the mitzvah of challah – but we'll sink our teeth into that after the service. Before that, the middle of the parshah goes into details about certain sacrifices. While it is currently baseball season, with the move of the National League to having the designated hitter instead of pitchers hitting, sacrifices are becoming more rare in modern life than ever before. So we won't step up to the plate about that this time.

Now we've gotten back to the main event. As we began this week's exciting episode, the Israelites were just one year past the Exodus from Egypt. As you just heard, the parshah begins with Moses sending twelve spies into the land of Canaan – the most spies assembled for one mission since the plethora of James Bonds in the 1967 version of Casino Royale. And, much like James Bond and the other double-0s, these twelve spies

took their orders from the M who was in charge. The spies didn't return for forty days and forty nights, though unlike what Noah was equipped with, Moses wouldn't let them take the current ark with them.

As Moses requested, the spies returned with grapes, a pomegranate, and fig, to show everyone how wonderful the farmer's markets are where they're headed. But ten of the twelve spies saw billboards advertising baseball in San Francisco, and thus reported that the promised land was filled with giants. Having seen highlights of all the home runs from recent games, they also claimed that these giants had more power than the Israelites.

The other two spies, however, were more optimistic. They pointed out that it was an odd-numbered year so there's no way the Giants would win it all in the end. But it's often easier to stoke fear than to curry hope, so the Israelites started bemoaning their plight, asking to return to slavery in Egypt rather than be defeated by the Canaanites.

The two positive spies – Joshua and Caleb – failed to persuade the people, and then they got stoned. No, not that kind. The non-medicinal, rock-hurling kind. The Big G intervened, then told Moses that He was going to send a plague to wipe out the Israelites for their latest instance of persistent lack of faith. Moses pointed out that saving the people from slavery only to execute them all a year later was bad optics to the rest of the world. So the Big G compromised, agreeing that the Israelites wouldn't be immediately wiped out, but that the current generation wouldn't enter the Promised Land. So, yes, there are many reasons we hear about why the Israelites didn't get to enter the Promised Land – the Golden Calf, Moses hitting the rock instead of chatting with it, and so on. And even though it's true that not one out of two million Israelites brought a map with them, or during the Exodus stopped at the AAA office to pick up a Triptik – remember those? They still exist! – *this*, the belief in the ten spies' fearmongering rather than faith in the one who brung 'em, is the actual reason the Israelites were stuck in the desert for forty years and forty nights.

There were a few additional repercussions. The two optimistic spies, Joshua and Caleb, were the only two men currently over age twenty who would be allowed to enter the Promised Land. The other ten spies weren't allowed to live through the night. And a

group of Israelites decided that it was somehow logical – in the special way that the fearmongered often exercise logic – to first believe the ten spies that there was no way to defeat the Canaanites, then be upset that they were banned from entering the Promised Land and forced to live out their lives wandering the desert for forty years, to going on their own now to take on the same Canaanites who they just thought they couldn't defeat – which started the whole mess – and to do so in much smaller numbers and without the Big G's help. They were, as one might expect, quickly taken out by Amalek and the Canaanites.

The beginning of the parashah lists the twelve spies by name – one from each of the twelve tribes. From the order that they're named, one can infer that in the fine tradition of her-slash-his majesty's secret service, Caleb was 003, and Joshua 005. Though, actually, it wasn't Joshua. The list of the twelve spies mentions Hoshea, not Yehoshua. But the verse right after the list says, אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח מֹשֶׁה לְתוֹר אֶת־הָאָרֶץ

“These are the names of the men Moses sent to scout the Land” – or as I like to translate “la-toor”, “to tour” the Land...

וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְהוֹשֶׁעַ בֶּן־נּוּן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ : “and Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua.”

We've seen some ancient name changes before. Abram to Abraham. Sarai to Sarah. Nathan Birnbaum to George Burns. But while the Big G was involved in all three of those name changes, this time it's Moses changing someone's name. Believe it or not, there are rabbinic opinions about this. (I know, it's hard to believe.)

The 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Venetian rabbi Moshe Chafetz, in his 1710 Torah commentary Melekheth Machashevet (which I've been slowly, slowly translating for the past couple hundred years) goes into this. At first, he cites Rashi who said that Moses prayed to the Big G saying, “may God save him from the plot of the spies.” Meaning that Moses asked the Big G to let him change Hoshea's name to distance him from the other spies. This is a commonly held rabbinic opinion.

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However, R. Chafetz counters this by saying that therefore Joshua should have been mentioned in the Torah earlier by the name Hoshea, and on the contrary before sending the spies he was always known as Joshua and not Hoshea. Also, Moses in the day of his death called him Hoshea in parshat HaAzinu. And indeed God called him Joshua in parshah Vayelech, and in his own book (of the bible, which is called *Joshua*) he's also always called by the name of Joshua? So, we need to interpret the reason.

And R. Chafetz does. So, imagine you're sitting in shul in Venice. In around 1710. And you understand Italian. And I'm speaking Italian. R. Chafetz dives in to interpret, by saying...

But this is indeed the custom from antiquity for a man who retires to serve the king, that they change his name and make for him another name like a name of the great ones in the land, a name that indicates his service and his burden – As Joseph (Genesis 41), who changed his name to Tzafnat “interpreter of dreams.” And as (Daniel 1:7) in Daniel and his friends, to inform everyone of his being as a new creation and as a little one who was born to emerge from resentment of himself into service of the governor and minister.

And as Joshua, on the day of his birth his name was Hoshea, and when he retired into service of the ruler Moses, his rav changed his name to Joshua, by this custom.

And so when he was (Moses') servant, it always was his name, and they called his name Joshua and not Hoshea, as written (Exodus 33:11) "and his servant Joshua" (above 11:28) "and answered Joshua servant of Moses." Surely, now that Moses had to choose men as heads of the thousands of Israel and not slaves and servants, you need to return to him his previous name which indicates his freedom, and so they called him in this to the tribe of Ephraim Hoshea son of Nun and not Yehoshua this time.

(This is all still R. Chafetz talking, not me.)

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And what about it saying "And Moses called Hoshea son of Nun, Joshua," what reason as was said, why did it return here to call him Hoshea and not by his name Joshua as he was called until now? And the reason is that Hoshea is his name forever, and they called him Joshua until now because of his being (Moses') servant, as is custom. And to this it said "and these are the names of the men (and so on; 13:16) and Moses called Hoshea son of Nun, Joshua" as if to say Moses needed to send men to scout the land and not servants, so he returned to call him by his previous name Hoshea and not mention him in the name Joshua, which indicates his service. Therefore "and Moses called Hoshea son of Nun, Joshua" meaning that if we call him Joshua before, it's not because that's his name rather it's according to that Moses called him so from before when he came to serve him, and that's not his name.

This was Moses' humility, on the contrary, to be called Joshua is an honor to him, who as servant of a king is a king, and so God showed this to him in calling him by the new name Joshua and not Hoshea in parshah Vayelech, and so Joshua himself in his book would honor Moses as the teacher and boast of the name Joshua, his being a servant of Moses, thinking it was to him as honor and glory.

And Moses had him assume his routine in parshah HaAzinu and called him Hoshea to indicate his freedom in this day for his entering into rulership after him to rule over Israel, and so it's not appropriate to call him in the name of a servant, as in previous days:

So, in short, Rashi's claim that Joshua's name change was to distinguish him from the other spies because he was referred to as Joshua long before. So, instead, we look at the custom of the time for people to take on a different name that represents their direct service to the ruler, like Joseph and Daniel did. And since the twelve spies were selected from among leaders of the tribes, referring to Joshua in a name that represents his servitude wasn't appropriate. And Joshua kept the name Joshua after becoming leader himself because of the notion "he who's servant of a king is a king" and the Big G

showed him the respect of Moses having been his leader by continuing to use the new name.

Also, by Rashi's logic, wouldn't Calev's name also have been changed to distinguish him from the other ten spies? Right. And speaking of Calev, he actually was an unsilent partner in the spies controversy.

And Calev quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let's go up and possess (the land) because we're able to overwhelm **it**" (13:30):

R. Chafetz says, and he didn't say "because we're able to overwhelm *the people*"? Since Calev wailed about the lie that the spies brought from their hearts that the cities were large and walled, and he wanted to inform them that lies were in their mouths, and to say that the cities are fenceless and open, not walled such that "going up" alone they'll possess it without war. And "let us go up and possess it because we're able to do it" when no fortresses are in it.

And since this is a dispute in reality, and the living doesn't deny the living in speaking the truth, so the men who went up with him turned around their claims into something else with the strength and courage of the people in saying "we aren't able to go up to the people (and so on; 13:31)" and they didn't claim again about the cities:

In other words, the ten spies at first spoke of the mighty walled cities. But they described the cities from fear in their hearts, which drove them to lie about the cities being so fortified. And Calev saying "it" simply is pointing out that the cities themselves weren't as the ten spies claimed – that they were open and defeatable. And in the next verse, the ten spies shifted to talking about the challenge of defeating the people, not the cities.

Now, normally, for every two rabbis there are three opinions. I'm not a rabbi, and our rabbi is on sabbatical, so R. Chafetz has graciously made a third one of his opinions on the spies story translatable enough for me to share. For this we shift ahead to the Big G banning the current Israelites from entering the Promised Land.

They won't see the land which I swore to their fathers, and all who rejected me won't see it (14:23):

R. Chafetz says that this is according to that the punishment comes *not* to atone for the crime, but to be a barrier to sinners. And this is given to punish the sinner like another sin, "and he who kills a man will die (Lev. 24:21)."

And if murder is a bad thing, why did we murder the killer? Only so that from him morality will be taken and all the people will hear and see, and they'll no longer be or do like him.

So, if God forgives the desert generation and lets them enter the land, already he'll give permission to all the world to rebel against Him and to be one of His rejecters. And a king who forgives on his honor, his honor isn't forgiveness and he does no good for his people. Thus, it said, "they won't see the land which I swore to their fathers, and all who rejected me won't see it," meaning that if I repent to go into the land, it comes to me that it'll now increase the "rejecting of me". And from now on, therefore, you "won't see it."

In other words, the Israelites not being allowed to enter the Promised Land isn't a punishment or atonement for their crime. It's a barrier for sinners, similar to how Leviticus says that someone who kills someone else is to die. Hebrew doesn't have capital letters, but that verse of Leviticus has capital punishment. (Of course, Judaism largely never did; but we'll take as read the whole thing of making it nearly impossible to execute someone by needing multiple eyewitnesses, and how execution was so rare that a Sanhedrin who executed just one person in seven years was considered a bloodthirsty Sanhedrin.)

So R. Chafetz asks why we kill a killer. Only to give people a reason to not emulate the killer themselves. In this instance, R. Chafetz's point is that the Big G forgiving the Israelites and letting them enter the Promised Land would be a sign of weakness, and would encourage everyone to reject Him. And if they get to repent and then enter the land, the rejecting will only increase.

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So, what does this give us? Joshua's name comes first from a special name for serving the leader Moses, then persists as an honoring of Moses. Second, during this current month when we're reminded of the importance of pronouns, Calev's simple use of just one pronoun calls the ten spies on their lie and forces them to change tactics. And third, not entering the Promised Land isn't mere punishment, it's a barrier for sinners and a way to not weaken the Big G and foster more rejection of Him.

And perhaps a bonus message from all this: Good luck to the San Francisco Giants in this odd-numbered year – according to this parshah, they're going to need it. Especially when facing Jewish hitters. I don't know how Joc Pederson can handle it, though. He's Jewish *and* a Giant. Regardless, with a third of their lineup being former Mets, they're doing better than my actual Mets. Shabbat Shalom.

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