

This week's *Parashah* opens with the Spies' mission to and their negative report about *Eretz Yisrael*. The Spies said (13:28), "The people that dwells in the Land is powerful, the cities are very greatly fortified, and we also saw there the offspring of the giant." *Bnei Yisrael* believed this report and despaired of conquering the Land.

But one of the Spies, Kalev ben Yefuneh, spoke up against his comrades. He said (13:30), "We shall surely ascend and conquer it, for we can surely do it!" *Rashi z"l* explains that Kalev was saying: "Even if the land were in heaven and Moshe were to say, 'Make ladders and go up there,' we should listen to him because we would be successful in all he tells us to do."

What was Kalev telling *Bnei Yisrael*? R' Meir Bulman *shlita* (rabbi of SEHC-Knesset Yehoshua in White Oak, Maryland) explains: Some commentaries teach that the Spies were motivated by fear of transitioning from the miraculous life *Bnei Yisrael* lived in the desert--*Mahn* from heaven, water from a rock, Clouds of Glory around and above them--to the natural life they would lead in *Eretz Yisrael*. Kalev's message was: Do you think life will be different in *Eretz Yisrael*? Even when we live a life subject to the "laws of nature," everything is still in *Hashem's* control. Our job is only to put in the effort, but the outcome--success or failure--comes from Him.

Kalev illustrated his message using a ladder as a metaphor. When one climbs a ladder, his feet must be firmly planted beneath him, but his hands must continually reach above him to pull him higher and higher. Will he reach the ladder's top in the heavens? Yes, if he has the proper attitude.

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## Shabbat

R' Mordechai Yaffe *z"l* (Poland; 1530-1612) writes: After *Ma'ariv* on Friday night, it is customary to recite the paragraph beginning '*Va'yechulu*' aloud while standing. The reason is that this recitation gives testimony that *Hashem* created the world, and witnesses are required to testify together while standing, which we learn from the verse (*Devarim* 19:17), "Then the two men shall stand before *Hashem*." (*Levush Malchut* 268:7)

R' Eliyahu Shapiro *z"l* (1660-1712; Poland and Central Europe) comments in the name of his grandfather, R' Aharon Shimon *z"l*: This explains a *Midrash* which states: "If one recites '*Va'yechulu*' on Friday night, two angels place their hands on his head and say (*Yeshayahu* 6:7), 'Your iniquity is removed and your sin shall be atoned.'" The *Halachah* is that witnesses (e.g., those who sign a *Get* / divorce document) should be told to repent before they sign, because a *Rasha* / sinful person is not acceptable as a witness. Likewise, when a person testifies that *Hashem* created the world, his sins must be forgiven so that he will be a valid witness.

(*Eliyahu Rabbah*)

R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai *z"l* (1724-1806; lived in *Eretz Yisrael* and Italy, but traveled throughout Europe and North Africa; known as "*Chida*") clarifies: One should concentrate intensely when reciting *Kiddush*, and he should think thoughts of repentance, for reciting '*Va'yechulu*' is meant to testify that *Hashem* created heaven and earth and that He rested on the seventh day. A sinful person is not fit to testify; therefore, one should think thoughts of repentance so that he will be fit to testify.

(*Avodat Ha'kodesh: Moreh B'etzba* 4:143)

R' Zvi Elimelech Shapira *z"l* (the *Bnei Yissaschar*; died 1841) adds: Know that there are several *Mitzvot* in the Torah that are called "*Edut*" / "Testimony"--among them, reciting *Kri'at Shema* twice a day. When doing any of these *Mitzvot*, one should take care to repent beforehand in order to be a kosher witness.

(*Derech Pikudecha: Hakdamah* 6)

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Louis Leonard Esterson / Aryeh Leib ben Yonah a"h (27 Sivan)

**“Bnei Yisrael were in the Wilderness and they found a man gathering wood on the *Shabbat* day.” (15:32)**

**“Hashem said to Moshe to say, ‘Speak to *Bnei Yisrael* and say to them that they shall make for themselves *Tzitzit* on the corners of their garments . . .” (15:37-38)**

Why does the *Mitzvah* of *Tzitzit* follow the incident of the wood-gatherer?

The *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni* relates: *Hashem* said to Moshe, “This man transgressed *Shabbat*.”

Moshe responded, “You know that on every day of the week a man has *Tefilin* on his head and on his arm, and he sees them and turns back from sinning. [In earlier generations, *Tefilin* were worn all day, not just during *Shacharit*.] Now, on *Shabbat*, when he is not wearing *Tefilin*, he sinned.

*Hashem* replied, “Go and give them something that they will do on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*. Therefore it says, “They shall make for themselves *Tzitzit*.” [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Gedaliah Eisman z”l (1910-2011; *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshiva Kol Torah in Yerushalayim) asks: It is understandable that wearing *Tefilin* or *Tzitzit* can raise a person’s awareness and save him from an unintentional sin! However, the wood-gatherer sinned intentionally, as is evident from the fact that he was put to death!

R’ Eisman answers: When one performs a *Mitzvah* (e.g., wearing *Tzitzit*), and it is not done by rote or out of habit, that *Mitzvah* can create in him a consciousness of G-d and a connection to holiness that can prevent him from ever falling to a level where he would transgress *Shabbat*.

R’ Eisman continues: We say in *Lecha Dodi* on Friday night: “*Likrat Shabbat* / Toward the Sabbath--come, let us go . . .” How can one know whether he will encounter *Shabbat* when he goes toward it? Maybe he will find nothing! The answer is in the following lines of the song, “For it is the source of blessing”--if one lives with the awareness that *Shabbat* observance is the source of all blessings, then “Last in deed, first in thought”--your initial thought of encountering and experiencing *Shabbat* as it is meant to be will, in the end, be realized.

(*Gidulei Mussar: Elul V’yemei Ha’din* p.24)

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So, too, said Kalev, we can conquer *Eretz Yisrael* and live in the Land subject to the laws of nature, because success is not up to us. True, our new reality will require us to be firmly planted in nature in a way that we were not in the desert, but we can succeed if we always reach for higher rungs of the ladder, i.e., we continually reach toward *Hashem*, for ultimate success is up to Him.

(Heard from R’ Bulman, 23 *Sivan* 5783)

**“Chevron had been built seven years before Tzo’an of Egypt.” (13:22)**

R’ Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z”l (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) writes: Our Sages say that Tzo’an was the place where Egyptian Pharaohs were raised and trained. Thus, it was a place of preparation for royalty. Paralleling this, Chevron is where King David lived during the first seven years of his reign, when he was accepted by only part of the nation. There he prepared to conquer Yerushalayim and rule over all of the Jewish People. Chevron also is where the groundwork was laid for other important events in Jewish history. For example, the Torah relates that Yaakov sent Yosef “from the valley of Chevron” to visit his brothers--which led to Yosef being sold and *Bnei Yisrael* descending to Egypt.

Why is Chevron connected with seminal events in Jewish history? R’ Kook explains: Chevron is where the Patriarchs and Matriarchs are buried. And, its name means “connection.” Thus, it reminds us at all times of the importance of maintaining our connection to our roots.

What is the significance of Chevron being built before Tzo’an? R’ Kook answers: Our Sages say that *Hashem* always creates the remedy before the malady. [Thus, for example, Esther was placed in Achashveirosh’s palace before Haman rose to power, though neither Esther nor anyone else could understand why she was there.] Egypt enslaved *Bnei Yisrael* in the hopes of quashing the latter’s greatness even before it could blossom. Thus, the antidote--Chevron, where Jewish leaders were prepared for greatness--had to be built before Tzo’an, where Egyptian leaders were groomed.

(*Me’orot Ha’Rayah: Chanukah* p.80)

**“They have tested Me these ten times and have not heeded My voice.” (14:22)**

Based on this verse, the *Mishnah* (*Pirkei Avot* 5:6) states that *Bnei Yisrael* tested *Hashem* in the desert ten times.

R’ Yehuda Lerma z”l (1580-1642; Chief Rabbi of Belgrade, Serbia) writes that *Bnei Yisrael*’s intention was to test a different one of the Thirteen Articles of Faith each time. (He explains elsewhere that Korach tested the remaining three.)

For example, at the *Yam Suf*, *Bnei Yisrael* said (*Shmot* 14:11), “Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the Wilderness? What is this that you have done to us to take us out of Egypt?” There, they seemed to be testing whether there exists a G-d that could save them.

In our *Parashah*, *Bnei Yisrael* do not question whether G-d exists, but only whether He is more powerful than the Canaanites. This effectively was testing whether *Hashem* is the Creator--for the Creator is necessarily more powerful than His strongest creation.

(*Lechem Yehuda*)