



קדושת המעשה בארץ ישראל The Sanctity of Human Action in the Land of Israel

■ The First Portion of Your Dough

The Torah portion of Sh'lach deals mainly with the bitterly tragic episode of the *meraglim* - the spies sent by Moshe Rabbeinu to scout out the Land. Their report led the Israelites to turn their backs on the Divine gift and mission. Immediately afterwards, the Torah gives us several new commandments, including the obligation to separate and give to the Cohanim a small portion of all dough that we prepare - the mitzvah of *challah*:

ראשית ערסתכם חלה תרימו תרומה ...

*The first of your dough, you shall raise up as challah
for a gift ... (Bamidbar 15,20)*

The verse continues by emphasizing that *challah* is just as important and holy as the mitzvah of *terumah*, i.e., the gifts we give the Cohen from our agricultural produce:

... כתרומת גרן, כן תרימו אתה.

... like the terumah, so shall you set the challah apart.

This parallel between *challah* and *terumah* is very significant. Consider *terumah*: It is not a mere gift to the Cohen, but actually becomes *kodesh*, sacred. For this reason, a non-Cohen who eats it commits a capital offense

(punishable not by a human court, but rather by Heaven). Neither may a priest in an impure state eat it, nor may he even touch it. This extreme sanctity is understandable, for *terumah* is the “first budding” of the wheat grown by Hashem.

But the nature of the holiness of *challah* is more difficult to grasp. G-d does not fashion the dough into *challah*; we prepare the flour, add water, and knead, at which point we are bidden to remove “*the first of your dough*,” rendering it subject to the obligations and sanctity of *challah*. How does a piece of man-made dough acquire holiness?

It acquires holiness because it was kneaded by a Jew in the Land of Israel. If it was kneaded outside the Land of Israel, the Biblical mitzvah of *challah* does not apply, as we see from the following law taught by R. Akiva:

If one brings flour from abroad into Eretz Yisrael, and then mixes it with water and kneads it into dough in the Land, he is Biblically obligated to separate *challah*, and the *challah* will have a Biblical status of sanctity. But if he did the opposite - that is, he took flour from the Land and prepared the dough abroad - he is exempt from the Biblical commandment of separating *challah*. (Sifri, Bamidbar 110)

The obligation is dependent not on where the wheat was grown, but rather where the dough was prepared. Only when a Jew kneads in the Land of Israel can the dough accept sanctity and the mitzvah of *challah*. Just as the sanctity of *terumah* stems from wheat grown in Eretz Yisrael, that of *challah* is rooted in the human action of kneading in Eretz Yisrael. Thus, not only Divine acts have sanctity; our mortal deeds are also imbued with holiness.

We learn this from the Torah’s introduction to the mitzvah of *challah*:

בְּבִאְכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְבִיא אֲתֶכֶם שָׁמָּה...
רֵאשִׁית עֲרֹסֹתֵיכֶם חֲלָה תְרִימוּ תְרוּמָה...

***When you come to the Land to which I am bringing you...
The first of your dough, you shall raise up as challah...*** (15,18-20)

The Torah thus equates between the beginning of Divine actions and the beginning of human actions; both are sacred, and both take place specifically in Eretz Yisrael.

What is the connection between the commandment of *challah* and the main story in Parashat Sh'lach, that of the Spies?

■ The Spies' Fears

Moshe sent the spies to scout out the Land in anticipation of Israel's imminent entry. But they returned with such a negative, fearful, and faithless report that the nation "forgot" G-d's promises and decided not to accept His gift. We cannot help but ask: What made the scouts so afraid of the Seven Nations then in power in the Holy Land? How could they have possibly fallen so low in their trust in G-d? What brought them to feel, "*We cannot rise up against the nation [then occupying the Land], for it is stronger than us*" (13,31)?

Yes, the giants in the Land of Israel were frightful: "*We saw there the titans, the sons of the giant... and we felt [as small] as grasshoppers, and so we were perceived in their eyes*" (verse 33). But this does not explain their tremendous trepidation. The scouts were not just anyone; they were "*all men of stature, heads of the [tribes of the] Children of Israel*" (verse 3)!

These leaders were witness to G-d's miracles causing the collapse of the greatest kingdom on earth at the time – the Pharaohs' Egypt! They also saw the Ten Plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the Clouds of Glory, the water flowing from the rock, the Manna from the sky, and more. Was all this not enough to prove to them the constant Divine supervision over Israel? Two of the scouts, Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh, told the others, "*G-d is with us! Do not fear them!*" (14,9) If Yehoshua and Calev were able to keep the big picture in sight, why were the other scouts blind to it?

The answer is rooted in the difference between G-d's leadership during the Exodus and in the Desert, on the one hand, and His guidance during the conquest and settlement of the Land, on the other. These were two different periods, marked by two different types of leadership.¹

The Exodus and the desert journeys were powered exclusively by miraculous Divine supervision, and the Israelites were merely passive partners. It began with Moshe's command as they were about to cross the Red Sea, with the Egyptians close behind:

ה' יִלָּחֶם לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תִּחְרְשׁוּן.

G-d will fight for you; you remain silent. (Sh'mot 14,14)

1. See our explanation in "*The Spies' Failure*," Parashat Sh'lach.

This was the type of atmosphere and experience that the scouts absorbed, where miracles take place without Israel's active participation. The scouts were imbued with a sense of G-d's active supervision in their lives.

All this was about to change with the entry and conquest of the Land of Israel. A long and drawn-out war for the Land was now required, involving active Israelite participation. In fact, the entire settling and building of the Land was to be accomplished not by Hashem's open miracles, but by the People of Israel themselves. They were to plant trees, build houses, and grow food. Hashem's supervision and help in their efforts in war and peace would be ever-present, but behind the scenes.

A perfect example of such can be found in Israel's second battle against the Ai, recounted in the Book of Joshua (chapter 8). We see that it was Hashem Who advised Yehoshua to place an ambush outside the city, and Bnei Yisrael, under Yehoshua's leadership, then carried it out cleverly and skillfully. This led the enemy to abandon the city and "chase after" the Israelites whom they believed had run away, thus bringing about Israel's ultimate victory. This shows us that it was G-d's will that Israel should wage war in a natural manner, with Hashem helping only with guidance and by sowing fear among the Canaanites.

This is very different than Joshua's first battle, the war against Jericho. There, the wall around the city fell miraculously, while Israel did nothing more than march around it and blow shofars! Why was G-d so involved in the battle for Jericho, yet He took a back seat in the battle against the Ai?

This question leads us to a more comprehensive understanding of the principle of Divine supervision over Israel. G-d created the world and imbued it with natural laws, alongside man's abilities and powers, and it was His will that these laws and properties should reign supreme. Only when they do not suffice to bring about His Divine will does He employ miracles and other supernatural means to achieve His desires.

In Egypt and in the desert, natural law simply could not guarantee that Israel would reach the Promised Land in security and with sufficient food and drink. This is why Hashem had to act, via His prophets Moshe and Aharon, to bring forth water from boulders, and manna from the Heavens, in subjugation of the laws of nature.

Once Israel reached the Land, the desert manna stopped, because it was no longer needed; the earth itself brings forth food according to natural law.

The boulder, too, ceased bringing forth water, for Eretz Yisrael was lush with streams. Neither was there a need for the Clouds of Glory, because the Israelites could build houses for protection.

The same is true regarding war: Am Yisrael had gained great experience and confidence after the battles against the Emorite kings Sichon and Og. They therefore needed no further actively-miraculous intervention in their wars with the Canaanites in Eretz Yisrael.

In Jericho, however, one more miracle was required to topple the walls, since this could not be done via natural means. Once this was accomplished, the people fought quite naturally with their spears and arrows against the enemy inside the city.

Here we see a total partnership between human actions and G-d's blessing and supervision. But this was something that the spies, back in the desert, were not accustomed to, for they had never experienced it. In fact, they still remembered the difficult war with Amalek which did not even end with a clear victory; Joshua was able merely to "*weaken*" or "*break the ranks of*" the enemy (Sh'mot 17,13).

Why did G-d not fight on their side against Amalek? Because Israel's faith in G-d was not strong; they had constantly been checking Him: "... *they tested G-d, saying, Is G-d amidst us or not?*" (Sh'mot 17,7) G-d therefore decided that the destruction of Amalek would have to wait several generations, until a king - King Saul - would reign over Israel in Eretz Yisrael.

The scouts realized that once they arrived in Eretz Yisrael, the rule would be that they would have to fight their own wars, with G-d's help but without His active and miraculous participation. When they saw the giants there, it simply frightened them.

What could be the antidote to this fear? The additive for strengthened faith was to be the mitzvah of *challah*. Let us see how.

■ **When You Come to the Land**

We saw above that both *terumah* and *challah* are equally holy. There is, however, one important difference between them. Let us again quote the Midrash Sifri:

Regarding *challah*, the verse says: "*Upon your entry into the Land.*"

R. Yishmael said: The Torah wrote about this entry differently than

all the others. Regarding the others, it said, “When you will come” and the like, while here it says, “Upon your entry.” This teaches you that immediately upon their arrival in Eretz Yisrael, they became obligated in the mitzvah of *challah*.

The mitzvah of separating *challah* is obligatory upon Israel from the very first day they enter the Land. The mitzvah of *terumah*, on the other hand, was not applicable until 14 full years had passed: the seven years of conquest, and another seven during which Israel divided the Land among the families of the tribes. The reason for this difference is this one word written regarding *challah*: בבוואכם, *upon your entry*.

So, *challah* applies immediately upon our arrival in the Land; what does this tell us?

We have already explained that *challah* is separated from kneaded dough. This teaches us that sanctity applies to the results of human actions, on condition that they are done in the Holy Land.

This is precisely the great message of the entire war for the Land of Israel! There is sanctity in our own actions of Divinely-commanded war for the Land. Such a war is not a profane, secular action; G-d stamps His Name upon our deeds and achievements that are directed towards fulfilling His will. This is why *challah*, of all things, was commanded to Israel even before the complete conquest of the Land – because it signifies that we need not worry, as the spies did, that G-d’s providence might not apply to our earthy actions. *Challah* indicates that G-d’s supervision is manifest in Bnei Yisrael’s actions, such as war for the Land.

This realization strengthens our trust in G-d, that which the Spies lacked. The mitzvah of *challah* rectifies the weakness that led to their terrible sin. And this is why the obligation of *challah* is mentioned right after the story of the Spies.

The other tithes, *terumah* and *maaser*, are different. They apply not immediately, but only after 14 years of conquering and dividing the Land. This is because the sanctity of *terumah* and *maaser* derives from the Land itself, where the seeds grow Divinely into holy produce – but this sanctity of the Land begins only when the Nation has truly taken root there, i.e., after its wars and after it has become sovereign, with every family knowing precisely its assigned estate.

This point is worth elaborating upon. What is the source for G-d's presence amid the Nation of Israel in the Land of Israel?

וְלֹא תִטְמָא אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יֹשְׁבִים בָּהּ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי שׁוֹכֵן בְּתוֹכָהּ...
*And you shall not defile the land upon which you reside
 [and] in which I dwell ...* (Bamidbar 35,34)

Is there a connection between the two highlighted phrases – Israel's habitation in the Land, and G-d's dwelling there? The continuation of the verse alludes to it:

... כִּי אֲנִי ה' שׁוֹכֵן בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.
... for I am G-d, dwelling amidst the Children of Israel.

The verse is to be understood as G-d saying: "Why do I dwell in the Land? Because I dwell amidst the Nation of Israel, which lives in the Land." Only in Eretz Yisrael does Israel live as a sovereign nation; outside it, Israel does not function like a nation, and is certainly not sovereign. That is to say: The sanctity of Eretz Yisrael stems from Israel living there as a nation, with G-d in its midst.

The mitzvah of separating *challah* joins the series of mitzvot whose essence is the rectification of the Sin of the Spies. Other similar mitzvot appearing in Parashat Sh'lach are *tzitzit* and the pouring of wine over the altar, as we have explained elsewhere. All of the Torah's mitzvot were given only to purify and refine man's soul and spirit. Their purpose is that we may cleanse ourselves of the weaknesses that overtake us and that express themselves in our sins.

■ The Historic Journey of the Letter *Yod*

Parashat Sh'lach begins with a list of the names of the Ten Scouts, after which it adds an interesting and strange detail:

אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח מֹשֶׁה לְתוֹר אֶת הָאָרֶץ
 וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְהוֹשִׁיעַ בֶּן נוּן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ.

*These are the names of the men Moshe sent to scout out the Land,
 and Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun "Yehoshua."* (13,16)

Moshe Rabbeinu changes the name of his loyal servant, the representative of the Tribe of Ephraim, by adding the little letter *yod* to the beginning of his name, and Hoshea thus becomes Yehoshua. It would seem that this change is connected to the fact-finding mission on which Moshe sent the scouts,

and the need to encourage and strengthen them. How is this accomplished? And, why was specifically the letter *yod* chosen for Yehoshua's new name?

The Medrash Rabbah (B'reshit 47,1), in its unique and picturesque style, comes to our aid to reveal the secret of the name Yehoshua:

R. Shimon bar Yochai said: The letter *yod* that Hashem took from Sarai [the Matriarch Sarah] was flying around before the throne of G-d, and said, "Master of the Universe, is it because I am the smallest letter of all that You took me away from the righteous Sarah?"

Hashem answered: "You originally were in a woman's name, and its last letter. I will now place you in a man's name, in its beginning: *And Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun 'Yehoshua.'*"

The added *yod* thus did not come out of nowhere, but rather from the name of Sarah Imeinu, after her name was changed from Sarai. And another thing that R. Shimon bar Yochai teaches us in this Medrash is that even a small letter is important, and is certainly not ignored or nullified without reason. Even the letter *yod* has a function – and an important one.

Let us now analyze the deep connection between Yehoshua bin Nun and Sarah Imeinu, and how it relates to the letter *yod*. We know the special bond, deep and strong, between our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and Eretz Yisrael. They lived in the Land, journeyed in the Land, and received prophecy here. G-d appeared to them time after time, promising them the Land as an inheritance for them and their descendants forever after. In the end of Parashat Bechukotai we read:

וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק
וְאֶת בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם אֲזַכֵּר וְהָאָרֶץ אֲזַכֵּר.

I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham, and I will remember the Land. (Vayikra 26,42)

Hashem remembers the Patriarchs together with Eretz Yisrael. They are bound together.

When Moshe Rabbeinu prayed for Israel after the Sin of the Golden Calf, he cited the merit of the Forefathers. But when he prayed for the nation after the Sin of the Spies and asked for Divine forgiveness for the sin of speaking ill of the Holy Land, he did not mention the Patriarchs and their merit. Why?

The Ramban, in his commentary to the Torah, explains that Moshe did not mention the Forefathers after this sin *precisely because* they were so closely bound up with the Land. How could he cite the merit of those who so loved Eretz Yisrael, on behalf of the people who had just turned their backs on that same Land? The merit would immediately be used against them!

Furthermore: The great strength of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov was their burning, perfect, unconditional faith in Hashem. Hashem had promised the Land to them and their children, and even though they went through many difficult trials there, their faith and trust that He would fulfill His word never wavered. In this respect, they were the exact opposite of the Spies who went to check out the Land and who did not believe that Hashem could rid it of the fearful people ruling there.

We saw above that the Spies said the people living in the Land were “*stronger*” – as if they were stronger not only than the People of Israel, but, if it can be said, even than Hashem Who accompanied Israel. They were clearly detached from the Patriarchs on this matter. This is the reason why one of the two righteous scouts, Calev ben Yefuneh, went to pray at the graves of the Patriarchs in Hevron. He went to attach his soul to the power of faith and self-sacrifice that so characterized Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

Yehoshua bin Nun, the second scout who did not fall into the trap that caught the other ten, also wished to join up with the Fathers of our Nation and their special bonds with the Land. He did so not by going to their graves, but by receiving a letter from the name of Sarai/Sarah. Moshe attached it to Yehoshua's name, thus joining him with the souls and character traits of the Forefathers.

■ From Within and Behind

The letter *yod*, the third letter of Sarah's original name, is also the first letter of the Name of Hashem.

Avram and Sarai set off to conquer the Land of Israel from the hands of the idol worshippers. With the strength of their faith in G-d, and with their boldness of spirit, they served as a “pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire” lighting the way for the world. Our Sages taught us that Avraham Avinu converted the men, while his wife would convert the women. They did not need the letter *yod* to walk before them; everywhere they went, Avraham would build an altar to G-d, and there he would call out in G-d's Name and spread the truth of His path (as in B'reshit 12,8 and 13,4).

But they did need protection from behind, so that no one would harm them or those with them. This is why it was important for the letter *yod* to be attached to the end of Sarah's name. Hashem told Avraham:

אַל תִּירָא אַבְרָם אֲנִכִי מֵאֵחָי לָךְ ...

Do not fear, Avram, I will protect you... (B'reshit 15,1)

That is, "Go forward with your strengths, and I will stand behind you and protect you." A perfect example of this is when Avraham went down to Egypt and Pharaoh took Sarai, thinking she was Avraham's sister – and G-d responded right away:

וַיִּנְגַע ה' אֶת פְּרִיעָה נֹגְעִים גְּדֹלִים וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ עַל דְּבַר שָׂרַי אִשְׁתֵּי אַבְרָם.

Hashem smote Pharaoh and his house with great plagues, because of the matter of Sarai, Avram's wife. (12,17)

When they completed their mission of walking the length and breadth of the Land of Israel, Hashem entrusted them with a new task: the building of the body and soul of the Nation of Israel. For this purpose, Hashem took the *yod* from Sarai's name and divided it in two – i.e., two letters *heh*. (The letter *yod* has a numerical value of ten, twice the value of *heh*.)

One of the *heh*'s was made part of Sarai's new name, Sarah, and the other one was given to Avram, rendering him Avraham. Note that the letter *heh* is also from G-d's Name - and it was now given over to Avraham and Sarah to help them build the Nation of Israel.

The letter *heh* inclines to the feminine gender in Hebrew. That is, words that end with a *heh* preceded by the *kamatz* vowel, such as *ishah* (woman), *yatz'ah* (she went out), and the like, are feminine. The *heh* also represents the reproduction and enhancement of the Jewish people: When it was added to Avraham's name, G-d said, "*I have made you the forefather of many nations*" (B'reshit 17,5), and a few verses later, when He added the *heh* to Sarah, He said, "*Kings of nations will come from her.*" (verse 16)

From there on in, their descendants Yitzchak and Yaakov concentrated on the spiritual and physical building of the family of the House of Yisrael; the ties to the Land were maintained, but its conquest was put on hold. After 400 years, Yehoshua bin Nun received the scepter and the mission of conquering Eretz Yisrael.

Moshe knew that the conquest of the Land of Israel required great powers of "action," as well as tremendous spiritual strengths. In Eretz Yisrael,

Heavenly help would be supplied only after the people themselves prepare for war with full strength and faith.

However, Moshe feared that Yehoshua might be lacking the full extent of the necessary spiritual powers. This is why he gave him the letter *yod* in its entirety. The letter *yod* is a masculine letter – as seen by its central presence in words such as *ish*, *shir*, *kir* – and it symbolizes action. Moshe not only granted him the entire “ten” of the *yod*, but also placed it at the beginning of his name, serving as a type of “pillar of cloud and fire” similar to the advance guard for Bnei Yisrael on their desert journeys.

As Rashi tells us, based on the Talmud (Sotah 34b), when Moshe gave Yehoshua his new name, he prayed, “May Hashem [represented by the letters *yod* and *heh*] save you from the wicked counsel of the other Spies.” Thus Yehoshua, armed with a link to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, was enabled to lead the People of Israel in their conquest of the Land of Israel, in fulfillment of Hashem’s promise to their Forefathers.

