

Shabbat Shalom Fax

Parshat Shlach

Tel: 815-301-1928

Fax: 815-301-1928

Email: shabbatshalomfax@gmail.com

ShabbatShalom.org

Insights into life, personal growth & Torah

26 Sivan, 5782

The Fax of Life

ד"סב

June 25, 2022

GOOD MORNING! Recently, I began thinking about gift giving and the inherent conundrum it creates. A gift is given to make the recipient happy and to express the closeness of the relationship. In order to make the recipient happy you need to know what they want. However, if you don't know what they might want, you can't ask them because that demonstrates that you aren't close enough to really know them.

Then, of course, there's the situation where you get the person exactly what they want, but this gift might make someone else in their life miserable, like getting your grandchild a puppy or a drum set. This reminds me of the following story, a version of which happened to a friend of mine.

When the four-year-old boy opened the birthday gift from his grandmother, he discovered a water pistol. He squealed with delight and headed for the nearest sink. His mother was not so pleased. She turned to her mother and said, "Mom, I'm surprised at you! Don't you remember how we used to drive you crazy with water guns?"

Her mother smiled sweetly and replied, "I remember."

This week's Torah portion includes a remarkable lesson regarding the importance of giving someone what they actually desire and not something that you think they **should** want.

"They awoke early in the morning and ascended toward the mountaintop saying, 'We are ready, we shall go up to the place of which Hashem has spoken – we have sinned'" (Numbers 14:40).

This week's Torah reading recounts the tragic story of the twelve spies whose negative report on the Land of Israel caused the Jewish nation to reject the notion of entering the land, and sowed seeds of both discontent and insurrection; "*Why is God bringing us to this land to die by the sword? [...] Is it not better to return to Egypt?*" and "*Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt!*" (Numbers 14:2-4).

It is quite astonishing that a nation that was barely a year removed from miraculously leaving Egypt – a country that had enslaved them for hundreds of years – was now pining for their halcyon home of yesteryear. As one might imagine, God did not take kindly to this ingratitude and He decreed that the Jewish nation would wander in the desert for forty years and that the entire generation would die and not enter the Land of Israel.

The story of the twelve spies is well-known, but there is an oft overlooked postscript to this calamitous story, it is the incident of the "*Mapilim – Defiant Ones*."

In brief, the morning after the terrible decree that the entire generation would perish in the desert and not enter the Land of Israel, a large group decided that they would show the Almighty that they really **did** desire to enter the land. Thus, they began ascending the mountain and told Moses, "*We are ready, we shall go up to the place of which Hashem has spoken – we have sinned*" (Numbers 14:40).

Upon hearing their plans, Moses warns them explicitly, "*Do not ascend, it will not succeed. Do not ascend, for God is not in your midst [...] You have turned away from God and He will not be with you*" (Numbers 14:41-43).

So the people listened to Moses, abandoned their plans and went back to their tents to spend some time reflecting on their misdeeds, right? Of course not!

Naturally, the people were intransigent; they adopted an attitude of "we'll show you!" and defiantly attempted to go up to the Land of Israel anyway. Of course, and just as Moses had predicted, they were utterly wiped out by the Amalekite and Canaanite nations who dwelled in the mountains surrounding the Land of Israel.

One of the overriding principles of Judaism is that the Almighty desires a relationship with His children and gives mankind the opportunity to repent and return back to Him. This is the concept and process known as *teshuvah* and this opportunity is one of the greatest gifts that God bestowed on an imperfect humanity.

The great 18th century Hasidic master known as Bal Shemtov wonders why their admission, "*We have sinned*" isn't considered a true repentance. In other words, they seemingly accepted responsibility for their sin of trusting the twelve spies and rejecting the Land of Israel. Why didn't the Almighty accept their contrition and allow them to enter the Land of Israel? Why were they punished so severely?

There is a fundamental misunderstanding about what exactly the transgression was in the episode of the twelve spies. It is commonly understood that the Jewish nation was punished for not trusting in the Almighty and not believing that the land He was taking them to was a truly wonderful place.

While it is true that it was wrong not to trust the Almighty, this trust was violated initially by sending the

spies in the first place. In other words, the very idea that the Land of Israel needed their approval was already a breach in their trust. Still, God tolerated this indignity.

Their real transgression, the one that caused the decree of death on the entire generation, was their refusal to go enter the Land of Israel **even after knowing it was what God desired**. The punishment of wandering in the desert for forty years wasn't because they expressed distrust; rather it was for not fulfilling the will of the Almighty.

We know that the Torah was given as a means of having a most amazing life. This often leads us to attempt to justify or explain why keeping the *mitzvos* is really better for us – being faithful to one's spouse will lead to a more fulfilling marriage, we shouldn't eat pork because it can cause trichinosis, Shabbat is a great day to charge the physical and emotional batteries, etc.

This is a mistake. While it is important for us to recognize the amazing benefits of a Torah based life, we don't just keep the laws for which we devise reasons or deduce God's intent. We must never lose sight of the fact that the real reason we follow all the commandments in the Torah is because we accepted the Torah and committed to obey God's will.

It just so happens that my wife HATES the cold. Anything less than 75 degrees and she wants a sweater. If I would decide to gift her with tickets to see Shakespeare in the Park in New York in January, it wouldn't be much of a gift. You can't gift others something that you want them to have, you have to give them something that they would want or recognize that they need.

This is what happened with the story of the "*Mapilim* – Defiant Ones." The morning after the calamity of the twelve spies, they admitted that they made a mistake in listening to the spies who misled them regarding the dangers of the Land of Israel. However, they never admitted to the fact that they were wrong in not listening to God in the first place. They assumed they could undo the previous night by showing God that they now agreed with Him by expressing their enthusiasm for the Land of Israel.

But they missed the point. This wasn't about the sin of trusting the spies, this was simply about not following God's wishes to go into the land. The reason that their admission of "*we have sinned*" isn't considered a proper act of repentance is because the *Mapilim* misunderstood what their sin was. They thought it was about not trusting God, when really it was about not obeying God.

This is why the next morning they immediately repeated their mistake: Moses explicitly told them that they were not obeying the will of God and that He would not be with them. Stubbornly, they went anyway because they wanted to display that they now agreed that the right decision was to enter the Land of Israel.

Unfortunately, they wanted to give God something that He did not want. Sadly, this led to their slaughter at the hands of the Amalekites and Canaanites.

TORAH PORTION: Shlach, Numbers 13:1 - 15:41

The Jewish people received the Torah on Mt. Sinai and were ready to enter the land of Israel. There was a consensus of opinion amongst the people that we should send spies to see if it was feasible to conquer the land. Moses knew that the Almighty's promise to give the land included a guarantee to conquer it. However, one of the principles of life, which we learn from this portion, is: the Almighty allows each of us the free will to go in the direction we choose. Even though one man and the Almighty is a majority, Moses – by Divine decree – sent out the princes of the tribes (men of the highest caliber) to spy out the land.

Twelve spies were sent. Ten came back with a report of strong fortifications and giants; they rallied the people against going up to the land. Joshua ben Nun and Calev ben Yefunah (Moses' brother-in-law) tried to stem the rebellion, but did not succeed. The Almighty decreed 40 years of wandering in the desert, one year for each day they spied in the land of Israel. This happened on the 9th of Av, a date noted throughout Jewish history for tragedy.

SHABBAT LIGHTING: *Jerusalem* 7:13 Miami 7:57 Cape Town 5:27 Guatemala 6:16 Hong Kong 6:53 Honolulu 6:58

 Jo'Burg 5:07 LA 7:50 London 9:06 Melbourne 4:50 Mexico 8:00 Moscow 9:00 New York 8:13 Singapore 6:54 Toronto 8:45

“QUOTE OF THE WEEK”: A true gift comes with ribbons, not strings.

Dedicated in Loving Memory of
Her Late Husband Sheldon
by Sarah Weissbard



Shabbat Shalom,

Yitzchak Zweig

Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

Honor a Loved One! Dedicate an edition of the Shabbat Shalom Fax **ShabbatShalom.org** (IRS# 65-0389241)

Friend of the Fax \$54 Benefactor \$118 Patron \$252 Fax Dedication \$360 Partner \$1,000
Shabbat Shalom Fax ● PO Box 402666 ● Miami Beach, FL 33140

To be removed: Send the name & fax number to: rabbizweig@shabbatshalom.org — or ... fax/call: 815-301-1928