

JUNE 4, 2018

## Parashat Shelach

### Spies and Strings

A blue strand (Numbers 15:38)

פתיל תכלת (במדבר טו:לח)

The United States and our allies around the world—including Israel—have long sought to ensure that Iran does not acquire a nuclear weapons capability. Successive U.S. administrations have also pushed back at Iran’s regional aggression, deplorable human rights record, and frequent threats to the Jewish state. In a recent [speech](#), Secretary of State Mike Pompeo unveiled the Trump administration’s new Iran policy. Pompeo laid out 12 requirements that the U.S. expects Tehran to agree to in any future accord. Amongst the U.S. demand are: Iran must acknowledge past military dimensions of its nuclear program; expand the access given to nuclear inspectors; effectively end its ballistic missile program; release U.S. detainees; end its support for groups like Hezbollah and Hamas; and pull forces out of Syria.

The dramatic story of the spies in this week’s *parsha* was a turning point for the Jewish people in their quest to reach the land of Israel. Ten of the twelve spies whom Moses sent reconnaissance the land came back with a report that demoralized the nation; only Joshua and Caleb dissented. They told the people that the conquest of the Land was achievable because God was with them. These two leaders received their reward. They alone of their generation lived to enter the land of Israel. The remarkable quality of these two leaders was the confidence they had in themselves and in the project that they were pursuing. They were absolutely convinced that the goal could be achieved.

The classic Torah commentators note that in the final section of this *parsha*, the mitzvah of *tzitzit* appears to be a non sequitur. How does the message of *tzitzit* relate to the episode of the spies? The Talmud (*Menachot* 43b) suggests that the blue string, which is prescribed by the Torah to adorn the *tzitzit*, “is similar to the sea, which is like the clear blue sky, which is the color of God’s ‘heavenly throne.’” The *tzitzit* can be viewed as a symbol of success and an emblem of confidence. Blue is the color of the sea, the sea is a symbol of vastness and power. Blue is the color of the sky, when we look up, when we are optimistic and hopeful. The color blue also reminds one of the heavens and the knowledge that we are not alone in our efforts; we are to be ever cognizant of the Divine assistance that enables us to complete our goals and fulfill our aspirations. The closing mitzvah of the *parsha* brings home the point that we must be bold and unafraid when pursuing what is moral and what is just.

We in the American pro-Israel community appreciate our country’s concerted efforts to stand firm in dealing with the looming threat from Tehran. Iran—the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism—remains Israel and America’s greatest threat in the Middle East. The U.S. administration’s approach, outlined in Secretary of State Pompeo’s speech, seeks to end the nefarious behavior of the current regime, eliminate Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear weapon and ensure that the Iranian people no longer suffer deadly limitations on individual liberty. Thus, it is critical to continue to work closely with members of Congress in a bipartisan fashion to forge policies that will ensure that the safety and security of America, of Israel, and of our allies in the region and around the world. ■

## We Are Not Grasshoppers

We were in our eyes as grasshoppers (Numbers 13:33)

ונהי בעינינו כחגבים (במדבר יג:לג)

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Concentrated along Israel's northern border, in Beirut's suburbs, and throughout the Bekaa Valley, Hezbollah poses a direct threat to Israel. Deploying a significant hybrid force, including both military and terrorist components, the group's arsenal exceeds many national armies. With an estimated 150,000 rockets and missiles, Hezbollah can strike any location in Israel. Hezbollah has placed Lebanese civilians at extreme risk in any future conflict by implanting its forces, missiles, and weapons caches in civilian areas. The terrorist group is stronger today than ever before and gaining combat experience in Syria. The next war in Lebanon will likely be far worse than that of 2006.

In our weekly reading of the Torah, we have been following the Israelites journey in the desert since the exodus from Egypt. They now stand at the cusp of reaching their goal and finally entering the Promised Land. The nation turns to Moses and requests to send spies to explore the land in order to return with critical information that will guarantee their success in their struggle to obtain the land. The spies examine the land for 40 days and, as we all know, come back with a negative analysis. They report back to Moses and the nation of Israel: "...all the people we saw in the land are men of great stature...and we were in our own eyes as grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes" (Numbers 13:33). In the course of their despairing description of the land and its inhabitants, the spies blurt out a statement that exposes what was actually going on in their heads and hearts. By comparing themselves to grasshoppers they saw themselves as small and lacking ability; they lost their confidence and saw themselves as weak.

It is certainly true that the spies were faced with a difficult mission. However, they had two choices as to how to deal with the challenges they would encounter when entering and conquering the land. They could see themselves as weak and small—like a grasshopper. The other path was to rise above fears, overcome the apprehension, and feel secure in their abilities to reach the goals they set for themselves. Often, in our own lives, when choosing a more challenging path, we discover that we are *not* weak, and that in truth we have abilities we did not recognize before. This lesson resonates for the U.S. and Israel today when they face adversaries in perilous times. When we firmly believe in our mission and are convinced that we are acting appropriately and morally, it will cause others to value our strength—and will ultimately lead to our success and triumph.

The citizens of Israel, like the citizens of every country, deserve the right to feel safe and secure in their homes. Israelis—Jews and Arabs alike—know that it is not a question of *if* Hezbollah will launch an attack; it is only a question of *when*. Few of us in the United States can truly appreciate the gravity of that reality. We have the luxury of oceans to our east and west and friendly neighbors to our north and south. Instead, Israel has Hezbollah and Assad to the north and Hamas to the south. Thankfully, the U.S. Congress recognized these threats and, with our support, is taking efforts to aid the Jewish state and combat the threat from Hezbollah. The Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Amendments Act of 2017 ([H.R. 3329](#)) and ([S.1595](#)) would impose additional sanctions on the terrorist organization and those that support it. These bills have passed in their respective chamber and now need to have minor differences worked out before the final bill can be voted on and sent to President Trump for his signature. Please encourage your members of Congress and Senators to advance this legislation.

We can take pride in the leadership shown by the United States in recognizing the reality of the threat posed by Hezbollah and advancing policies to help the state of Israel defend herself from the threat on her northern border. ■

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