

07/01/16

Dvar Torah for Parshat Shlach Lcha

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Shlach Lcha

Hannah Kapnik Ashar | Bronfman Torah | Shlach Lcha 2016

*Greetings from Jerusalem, where the 2016 Bronfman Fellows have just begun their summer! **Hannah Kapnik Ashar '04** is Faculty and Community Educator at BYFI. She is also the Rabbinic Intern at Congregation Bonai Shalom in Boulder, Colorado. She has two daughters, Zivi and Ayala. Hannah was a fellow in 2004 and madricha in 2007 and*

2008.

In the last passage in the Shma, there's a line I find confusing. When we seek truth and realness, our hearts are extremely helpful, if not essential, guides. Which is why I'm troubled by a verse instructing us to:

"look at [your *tzitzit*] and recall all the *mitzvot* of the Lord, and do them, so that you *do not follow your heart* and your eyes in your lustful urge" (Numbers 15:39).

The idea that one might err by following after their eyes in lustful urge makes sense to me. But 'following your heart' is a key ingredient of self-actualization,

maybe the essence of spiritual practice, and certainly common advice at any graduation.

This passage is traditionally read twice daily as part of the Shma, but originally appears at the end of our parsha, Shlach Lecha. When read in the context of the Shma, this potentially bothersome verse comes in isolation from the stories leading up to it, which, of course, cast a different light on it.

ולֹא־תִתְּרוּ אַחֲרַי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרַי עֵינֵיכֶם "Do not follow your heart and eyes," or more precisely, "Don't go *tur*-ing after your heart and eyes." The word *latur* is not a terribly common word in the Torah, but it does come up several times in this week's parsha. After traversing the desert, the Israelites are approaching the Promised Land. Twelve spies, one from each tribe, are sent by Moshe ahead of the Israelites *latur et ha'aretz*, to scout out, to tour the land and "see what kind of country it is. Are the people who dwell in it strong or weak, few or many? Is the country in which they dwell good or bad? Are the towns they live in open or fortified? Is the soil rich or poor? Is it wooded or not?" The travel-weary Israelites are standing on the remarkable threshold of arriving home, and the spies are sent *latur*, to assess, what lies ahead of them.

And this is the spies' report (Numbers 13:27-33, NRSV translation, modified):

²⁷ And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us; it does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. ²⁸ Yet the people who live in the land are powerful, and the towns are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak (lit. Giant) there. ²⁹ The Amalekites live in the land of the Negev; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan."

³⁰ But Caleb [(one of the spies)] quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it."

³¹ Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we." ³² So they brought to the Israelites an unfavorable report of the land that they had spied out (*taru*), saying, "The land that we have gone through as spies (*latur*) is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. ³³ There we saw the Nephilim – the

Anakites come from the Nephilim; and in in our own eyes, we were as grasshoppers; that much more so in their eyes!”

27 וַיִּסְפְּרוּ-לוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ בָּאֲנֹכִי אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְתָּנוּ וְגַם זָבַת חֲלָב וּדְבַשׁ הוּא וְזֵה-פְרִיָּהּ:

28 אָפֶס כִּי-עָזוּ הָעָם הַיֹּשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ וְהַעֲרָוִים בְּצָרוֹת גְּדֹלֶת מְאֹד וְגַם-יִלְדֵי הָעֵנָק רָאִינוּ שָׁם:

29 עַמְלֶק יֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַגִּגָּב וְהַחִתִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי וְהָאֱמֹרִי יֹשֵׁב בְּהָר וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי יֹשֵׁב עַל-הַיָּם וְעַל יַד הַיַּרְדֵּן:

30 בַּיָּהֵס כָּלֵב אֶת-הָעָם אֶל-מִשְׁעָה וַיֹּאמֶר עָלֶיךָ נִעְלָה וַיַּרְשֵׁנוּ אֱתָהּ כִּי-יָכוֹל נוֹכַל לָהּ:

31 וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-עָלוּ עִמּוֹ אָמְרוּ לֹא נוֹכַל לַעֲלוֹת אֶל-הָעָם כִּי-חַזֵּק הוּא מִמֶּנּוּ:

32 וַיֹּצִיאוּ דְבַר הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תָּרוּ אֵתָהּ אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר עֲבַרְנוּ בָּהּ לְתוֹר אֵתָהּ אָרֶץ אֲכָלֶת יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ הִוא וְכָל-הָעָם אֲשֶׁר-רָאִינוּ בְּתוֹכָהּ אַנְשֵׁי מְדוּת:

33 וְשָׁם רָאִינוּ אֶת-הַנְּפִילִים בְּנֵי עֵנָק מִן-הַנְּפִילִים וְנָהִי בְּעֵינֵינוּ כְּחַגְבִּים וְכֵן הָיִינוּ בְּעֵינֵיהֶם:

The spies acknowledge that the land is flowing with milk and honey. This is, indeed, the glorious land we’ve been approaching all this time. And at the same time, they are paralyzed by fear. Their *turing* led them to forgo the Promised Land. Theirs was a touring and exploring that brought attention to the worst possible outcomes even in the face of the most destiny-fulfilling opportunity.

Sometimes it is the way of our hearts to amplify our fear. We see an opportunity for greatness or wholeness and we trip over the place of “how small we are in our own eyes.” And so the Torah enjoins us: *V'lo taturu acharei levavchem* – “do not follow your fear-prone heart in the way of the spies,” a reminder so important it merits being recited daily in the Shma. When you’re on the threshold of your next great thing, notice how much weight you’re giving to your what-if-ing mind (or heart). And know, or imagine, that if you go for it, there will likely be divine support to arrive in that Land of Milk and Honey.

Continue the conversation. Send Hannah your thoughts: hannah@byfi.org

07/01/16



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