

ALSO BY ARTHUR GREEN

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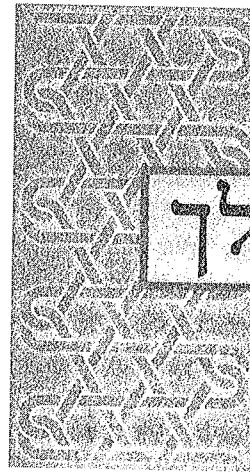
For People of All Faiths, All Backgrounds

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Be-Ha'alotekha Round Two

- EL: The call to turn inward is heard very loudly here, the inner self as the meeting-place between God and the person.
- AM: But the work is to purify yourself before going any farther, either toward union with God or toward working to uplift others.
- EL: The *Torey Zahav* text insists on that. You have to "do war in your land," struggle with your own earthly self, before you can "blow the horn" and see that God and man are two halves of the same cosmic self.
- OR: But does it always work that way? Aren't some people purified and uplifted within themselves through turning outward? Isn't there a back-and-forth between personal and collective redemption?
- EL: These are two modes of worship. For some, or in some situations, the self is transformed from without, sometimes by the influence of others and sometimes by joining in a collective task.
- AG: Hasidic wisdom makes room for both of those. The *tsaddik* can indeed uplift you, if you allow that to happen. But often the wise *tsaddik* tells you that you have to do the inner work on your own.
- EL: But we're losing focus on the really earth-shattering words of the Maggid here. God and the person are both incomplete without one another. We are mere *dam*, flesh and blood, without the divine *aleph*. But God too is "half a form" without us. What does that say to this whole conversation about how to become pure?
- AG: It raises up the importance of the task. If you make yourself into a proper vessel, you really can be joined to the One, fulfilling God's longing as well as your own. Then together you can really do the work of outward transformation.
- AM: If you purify and open your heart, God becomes accessible to you. This is the gift of *tsimtsum*, the cosmic Source of our lives acting like a loving parent who simplifies his mind so that the child can understand. Our Creator wants us ordinary flesh-and-blood humans to succeed in doing God's work.



שלה לך

Shelah Lekha

OR HA-ME'IR

They spoke to him, saying: "We came into the land where you sent us. It indeed flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. But the people dwelling there is strong..." But Caleb silenced the people for Moses, saying: "We will indeed go up and inherit it, for we are able."

(NUM. 13:27-28, 30)

The meaning in our terms of Moses's wanting them to scout out the land of Canaan was to teach Israel to scout out all the letters that are dressed in "land" or earthly things. To this they replied: Yes, **we came into the land where you sent us**. We indeed do want to see our King, to grasp divinity even as found within earthly matters and human pleasures. We do not want to cheat at the service of God, doing things that alienate us from Him. But we find it difficult. Not every mind is capable of this acting in the lower world while pointing toward the upper. It is all too likely that we will fall, remaining almost completely sunk in corporeality. Not only will we fail to lift anything up, but we will bring down those sublime letters of Torah, just making things worse. "Only few can rise high" (b. Sukkah 45b), having that power to uplift the letters of Torah.

This was "the ill report of the land that the Children of Israel scouted, saying: 'The land you sent us to scout is one that consumes its inhabitants'" (Num. 13:32). I heard the Maggid explain that the distinct character of

earthliness is that it destroys those who become too much at home in it, filling themselves with earthly pleasures. The word *yoshveha* ("its dwellers") implies delay ... destroying a person in both this world and the next. This happens to those who allow themselves to tarry, getting stuck in the physical world....

But Caleb silenced the people for Moses, saying: "We will indeed go up and inherit it, for we are able." RaSHI says that he silenced them all, since "Caleb had a different spirit within him" (Num. 14:24). His heart was truly whole with God. His soul deeply knew that the blessed Holy One does not seek confrontation with people, but gives each one of us the sort of burden we are able to bear. Each is given a heavier or lighter burden of service in accord with our degree of awareness and understanding. If only we turn our hearts toward heaven, we too can bring about ascent, lifting the limbs of the *shekhinah* to Her elevated home. This is the meaning of **We will indeed go up**. It is not as you said: **The people dwelling there is strong**, and therefore whoever does not have great awareness is as useless as a dry twig, unable to raise up the lower rungs. **We will indeed go up**, said Caleb, counting himself among them. Each of us on our own level can raise up the *shekhinah*. **We will indeed go up and inherit** Her (*otah*). We will all act as one person, together inheriting *otah*, the letter *eh*, *shekhinah*.

There is not one among Israel who does not have a place to hold on [to] the embodiment of *shekhinah*; each of us can do the work of cosmic repair corresponding to that particular hold. That proper work is easy to do, because we were not created in this world with a task harder than we can accomplish.... This "silenced them all," because the blessed Holy One does not impose service on people that is too hard for them to do.



Yes, there is a "right" place for each of us—all of us humans, not just Jews—to hold fast to the *shekhinah*. Once we find it, we will learn how each of us has to serve and what our task is in this world. But finding that place can be a lifetime's labor! The *Or ha-Me'ir* struggled mightily with issues raised as Hasidism grew into a widespread popular movement. This text is his answer to his own inner doubts about whether the community to whom he was preaching was up to the task.

OR TORAH (FROM MASSA'EY)

A land [*erets*] that consumes those who dwell in it [*yoshveha*].

(NUM. 13:32)

Every thing contains the ten [moral, human, and divine] qualities. That is what we mean when we say that the entire Torah is God's delight. Even its narratives speak of some quality like love or fear. The blessed Holy One is cloaked in each of them. You just have to take care to raise up every thought. If thoughts of love come to you, lift them up. The same with fear [and all the rest]. Don't just dwell or sit there with them! That would be really foolish.

A man travels to a city to do some business. [Instead of engaging in business,] he just "sits" there, having left his family behind. Can you imagine any greater folly? In the same way, the blessed Holy One sends you to a certain thought, in order that you raise it up. It would be really foolish of you to just dwell there with it and not restore it to God.

That is *erets*, the corporeal realm, that consumes those who just dwell in it forever.



Like Moses's spies, we too are sent into the land, the world of our physical selves and worldly thoughts, in order to do the "business" of uplifting and transformation. How easy it is, like the ten spies, to become intimidated. Or even worse—to just forget what we were sent here to do.

TSEMAH HA-SHEM LI-TSEVI I

Moreover [*ve-ulam*], as I live, the glory of Y-H-W-H fills all the earth.

(NUM. 14:21)

The sages taught (b. Hullin 89a): What should a person do in order to live? Make oneself as though mute (*ilem*). But might this apply to Torah as well? Thus Scripture says: "Of justice, you shall speak" (Ps. 58:2).

... The life-energy for this one who chooses silence also derives from words of Torah. They represent the letter *vav* of God's name, the Tree of Life. On this the *Zohar* (3:2a) quotes the verse "Give me a sign [or, "letter"] of truth and you will be kept alive" (Josh. 2:12-3). This refers to the letter *vav* [*tif'eret*, truth], upon which life depends. That is the *vav* that differentiates *ulam* ("moreover") from *ilem* ("mute" [distinguishing speech from silence]); life is drawn forth through this *vav*.

The glory of Y-H-W-H fills all the earth. Our sages read "Who is like You among the mighty" (Ex. 15:11) as "Who is like You among the mute" (*elim/ilmim*; b. Gittin 56b). He hears Himself cursed and is silent! In this way the glory of Y-H-W-H fills all the earth: even in the place of curses and disrespect, the glory of God hears and is silent. This is the source for the "mute" person's ability to remain silent and not feel those curses, to maintain balance whether praised or denounced. This is one of the most praiseworthy and exalted human states.

This is the meaning of "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it" (Ps. 81:11). The three letters of *ilem* ("mute") will be turned around to form *male'* ("full"). "Full is the blessing of Y-H-W-H" (Deut. 33:23). In this way, **the glory of Y-H-W-H fills all the earth.**



Hasidim were (and are) often mocked by both Jews and gentiles for their extreme displays of piety. The ability to maintain silent balance in the face of attacks, an ancient teaching of Jewish and other moralists, came to be highly praised. The cultivation of inner stillness, to nourish that balance, requires great skill. Here the silent one is seen as deriving that strength from Torah, the Tree of Life. The verse is being read to say, "In the silent one, I Y-H-W-H am alive; through such people, My glory fills the earth." How might this lesson apply to us today?

NO'AM ELIMELEKH

But my servant Caleb, because he was imbued with a different spirit and remained loyal to Me...
(NUM. 14:24)

There are two kinds of *tsaddikim*. There are some for whom it is necessary to be separated and apart from people. When they are among people they

may fall from their appropriate spiritual level. Then there are those who do not fall from their spiritual level even when involved in the community and talking to people. Actually, they have a positive impact on others.

This is similar to something I heard from my master and teacher, the great and holy R. Dov Baer of Rovno, whose soul rests in heaven. Regarding the statement "the holy flesh [of the sacrifices] never [*me-'olam*] spoiled" (m. Avot 5:5), he explained that a person who is "holy flesh," meaning a totally righteous person, never spoils, even when involved with the public (*'olam*) and conversing with them.

This is the meaning of the phrase **but my servant Caleb, because he was imbued with a different spirit.** He did not fall from his spiritual level even though he spoke with them (the other spies). On the contrary, he **remained loyal to Me.**



The Maggid is certainly attempting to encourage his disciples to take on leadership roles, and not to fear engagement with the broad community. However, one must imagine that even among Hasidic *rebbe*s there are very few "totally righteous" people, so the challenges of communal service and the dangers of corruption must have felt very real.

TSEMAH HA-SHEM LI-TSEVI II

Speak to the Children of Israel, telling them that they shall make themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations ... they shall be fringes for you, and you shall see it [or "Him"].
(NUM. 15:38-39)

Why is the word **themselves** needed in this verse? "They shall makes fringes" would have sufficed. This hints that they should make *themselves* into a way to see God. Thus RaSHI interpreted the word *tsitsit* ("fringes") as related to "gazing," as in "Behold He stands behind our wall, gazing [*metsits*] through the latticework" (Song 2:9). This brings about the fear of God, since "fear" (*yir'ah*) and "seeing" (*re'iyah*) are made up of the same letters. Therefore if you lay a garment down in a box, it does not require fringes (b. Menahot 41a), for the essence of the *mitsvah* lies in **themselves....**

At first, speaking of fear alone, the passage speaks in the third (“hidden”) person, for out of fear a person hides from the King. But when you love, you join yourself to the King. This is **and you shall see it**, referring to Y-H-W-H....

First it says: **they shall make themselves fringes** (= “gazers”), meaning that they shall seek ways of seeing for themselves. But then it turns into **they shall be fringes** (“gazings”) **for you**; this can be read to mean that you yourselves shall *become* ways of seeing.

This can be understood through the comment of *Midrash Shemuel* [Rabbi Shmu’el Uceda, sixteenth century] on “a seeing eye,” [as a quality that a person should choose—m. Avot 2:1]. In the physical realm, the eye does not really see. Light shines into the eye, and one sees by means of that light. That is why, scientists tell us, we do not see the air, since it is everywhere and lies directly upon the eye.... The *shekhinah* too fills all the earth, and that is why we are unable to see it. The physical person has no light in the eye but sees by virtue of this external [lit. “hidden”] light. But if we had essential light, from within the eye, we would see the air as well....

Thus Scripture says: “They will see eye to eye as Y-H-W-H returns to Zion” (Is. 52:8). Even though the eyes of God are everywhere, lying directly upon the human eye, we will be able to see them because we will have light in our eyes’ own essence. This is seeing “eye to eye.”

First fear alone: They shall make themselves gazing—drawing forth light so that they may look upon God. This can only be from a distance, as in “From afar Y-H-W-H appears to me” (Jer. 31:2). They could not see closer up, having no essential light within their eyes. But then, when they come to .. the level of love, it says, **They shall be** [gazings, *tsitsit*] **for you**, meaning that you make yourselves into seeing, the light coming from within you, so that you may see close up.



The *mitsvah* of *tsitsit* is here transformed—as all the *mitsvot* are supposed to be—into a path toward mystical insight, a transformation of the person (or community) as a vehicle of insight itself.

TSEMAH HA-SHEM LI-TSEVI III

They will be fringes for you, and you will see it and remember all the commandments of Y-H-W-H, and do them. You will not turn to follow your heart or your eyes, after which you go whoring.

(NUM. 15:39-40)

This means that you will attain the qualities of humility and lowliness, one before the other. **They will be fringes**, meaning that they will make themselves into such [lowly beings] as are dragged along on the edges of the garment.... Such humility will surely lead them to fulfill “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18), which contains the entire Torah (b. Shabbat 31a). Thus **you will ... remember all the commandments of Y-H-W-H**, which lie within this general rule....

When a person fulfills this commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself,” it means that you love the other as though he or she were you. When you give alms to that person, it is as though you were giving to yourself. You can’t stand seeing that person being disgraced any more than you could stand such disgrace to yourself. In this way you will come to see the face of the *shekhinah* without being ashamed. This is the word *tsitsit*, derived from “gazing [*metsits*] through the latticework” (Song 2:9), a way of looking....

You will see it and remember all the commandments. The sages taught (b. Berakhot 63a): “Upon what short phrase do all the great bodies of teaching depend? ‘Know Him in all your ways’ (Prov. 3:6).” Indeed the entire Torah depends on this. They also spoke of that would-be proselyte who said: “Teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot.” [Hillel’s answer was] to fulfill “Love your neighbor as yourself” by means of not doing to others what is hateful to you (b. Shabbat 31a)....

This is the impact of **Remember all the commandments of Y-H-W-H**, embodied in loving your neighbor as yourself. **After which you go whoring** represents the opposite of love. By following this path you will reach the high state of “Know Him in all your ways,” which is the entirety of Torah....

Really “Know Him in all your ways” is directly hinted at and included in “Love your neighbor as yourself,” since RaSHI interprets “neighbor” to refer to the blessed Holy One....



These readings of *Parashat Tsitsit* (the teaching on the fringes) represent a remarkable drawing together of the mystical and the ethical realms, a union that itself may be the most important task of religion.

Shelah Lekha Round Two

AG: The first and last teachings in this group tie together in a very powerful way. The real world of *artsyiyut*, daily living, is not a “land that consumes” us, because we’re promised that no person is given a task that is too hard to bear. We just have to stretch to carry the burden and make it a way of service. Then the last text reminds us that it’s all about loving our neighbor (and our Neighbor!); that alone will lead us to “know Him in all your ways.”

AM: The same is true in the little *Or Torah* passage. All of life is a series of occasions to uplift and serve. Don’t miss the opportunity! Everything depends on us and how we do our “business.” Yes, if you just sit there with *artsyiyut*, it will indeed consume you. So get to work!

AG: The positioning of this discussion in *Shelah Lekha* is especially powerful. Yes, it’s about you and your struggles with corporeality. But here is the people of Israel about to enter the Land. “Don’t let it drag you down!” is the message they are to hear. Being in the Land will mean lots of daily responsibility on the physical plane. See it all as an opportunity for service.

OR: Hear this as a religious Zionist—whether Rav Kook or Martin Buber—would. How will our coming into the Land become an opportunity for uplifting? And how will we avoid the pitfalls of being consumed by it?

VI: That sounds lofty. But what do you do when your *artsyiyut* comes in the form of a tank or a gun? That kind of “worldliness” is not so easy to uplift.

R: The ten spies are usually depicted as wicked or ill-willed. But here they’re not. “It’s just too hard for us!” is all they’re saying. They’re giving up.

I: That’s why they need Caleb to say to them: “You *can’t* give up!” His message is one of reassurance; the enemy he’s fighting is not wickedness, but despair.

OR: How do you know how to counsel people? When should they admit that the burden they’ve been given really is beyond them? And when is reassurance the right thing to offer?

AG: Yes, but remember the beautiful teaching about *tsitsit*: you can find God there, anywhere. Especially within yourself, using yourself as a way to “gaze” and find God.

OR: The simplicity and intimacy of *tsitsit* make this all the more powerful.

AM: And the love. Through your *tsitsit*, you gaze back at the Lover, who is peering at you through the latticework of the Song of Songs.

