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LA VOIE
A SUIVRE

DIFFERENT KINDS OF EFFORT (BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "Send for yourself men, that they may explore the land of Canaan that I give to the Children of Israel. One man, each from his father's tribe, shall you send; every one a leader among them" (Bamidbar 13:2). Why does the verse start in the singular with shelach lecha ("send for yourself"), but ends in the plural with tishlachu ("shall you send")? We also need to ask why the Children of Israel wanted these men to spy out the land, since the Holy One, blessed be He, had promised them that it was a good and spacious land. Can we even think that they did not believe Him? After all, the Torah explicitly states, "The people believed" (Shemot 4:31) as well as: "They believed in Hashem and in His servant Moshe" (ibid. 14:31).

The answer is that the Children of Israel thought that although it is a mitzvah to have faith in Hashem – as it is written: "Cast your burden upon Hashem and He will sustain you" (Tehillim 55:23) – it is also a mitzvah to do something for yourself. We obtain Hashem's help at that point, as the Sages have said: "For Hashem your G-d has blessed you in all your handiwork" [Devarim 2:7]. Could this occur even if one does nothing? It is written, 'in all your handiwork' – if a man does something, there will be a blessing; otherwise there will not" (Midrash Tehillim 23:3).

The sea did not split for the Children of Israel until they made an effort in that direction. Our Sages say, "Nachshon the son of Amminadav jumped in and descended into the sea first.... At the time, Moshe was engaged in prayer for a long time, and so the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: 'My beloved ones are drowning in the sea, and you are lingering in prayer before Me? ... Speak to the Children of Israel, that they go forward'" (Sotah 37a). This teaches us that G-d directed Moshe to tell the Children of Israel to put an effort into moving towards the sea, at which point He would open it for them. Since that is what they did, the sea immediately split before them. We find this idea mentioned in the Midrash: "Let their feet step forward from the dry land into the sea, and you will see the miracles that I will perform for them" (Shemot Rabba 21:8).

The process is the same in regards to the relationship between man and G-d. The Holy One, blessed be He, will only help a person once he himself takes the first step,

as it is written: "My sons, present to Me an opening of repentance no larger than the eye of a needle, and I will widen it into openings through which wagons and carriages can pass" (Shir HaShirim Rabba 5:3).

They Committed a Grave Error

In any case, the Children of Israel committed a grave error here. Although it is a person's duty to make an effort in everything, he is still forbidden to rely on his efforts, as stated by our teacher Rabbi Menachem HaMeiri Zatzal (Tehillim 128): "When making an effort to do something, a person must always remember that he must not have faith in his effort, even if he does everything that is required of him."

There are different ways of making an effort. We must always make an effort not to seek out miracles, and we must always do what we can so that our livelihood comes to us through natural means. The Gemara recounts, "It once happened that a man's wife died and left a child to be nursed, but he could not afford to pay for a wet-nurse. At that point a miracle was performed for him, and his nipples opened like the two nipples of a woman, and he nursed his son. Rabbi Yosef observed, 'Come and see how great this man was, such that a miracle was performed on his account!' Said Abaye to him, 'On the contrary – how lowly was this man, that the order of Creation was changed on his account'" (Shabbat 53b). It also states, "A man should never stand in a place of danger and say that a miracle will be performed for him, lest it is not. If a miracle is done for him, it is deducted from his merits" (ibid. 32a).

That said, even if a person puts an effort into lessening a miracle, he should not put his faith in his own deeds, but only in Hashem, as Jacob did. Although G-d said to him, "I will guard you wherever you go" (Bereshith 28:15), when the angels told him, "We came to your brother, to Esau, and he is coming to meet you and 400 men are with him" (ibid. 32:7), he readied himself for three things: Prayer, gifts, and war. However he did not place his trust in gift-giving and waging war, for he had faith in Hashem, as it is written: "I am too small for all the mercies and all the truth that You have done with Your servant.... Save me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau" (ibid. 32:11-12). This teaches us that he did not rely

on the natural effects of his efforts to be saved from his brother Esau, but solely on the Holy One, blessed be He.

Such was the error committed by the Children of Israel in the desert. Although G-d had promised them that Eretz Israel was a land flowing with milk and honey, they still wanted to make an effort to minimize any miracles when they entered the land. Hence they asked Moshe to send men to spy out the land, to find routes leading into and out of the land in order to conquer it in a natural way.

This complicated matters, however, for the Children of Israel placed their trust in their own efforts and in the spies, to the point of becoming evildoers and unbelievers. They even insulted Heaven by saying, "They are stronger than us" (Bamidbar 13:31). The Sages explain that by saying this, the spies were implying something much worse: "Do not read mimenu [than us], but rather mimeno [than Him]" (Sotah 35a). That is, they meant that even the Holy One, blessed be He, could not defeat the peoples living in Eretz Israel.

Bad Intentions Behind Their Efforts

This is why the Sages said, "Just as the return [of the spies] was with an evil intention, likewise the leaving [of the spies] was with an evil intention" (Sotah 35a). This is difficult to understand, for the spies were tzaddikim when they left, not evildoers! Yet since the Children of Israel forgot Hashem by placing their trust solely in their own efforts, they were in a negative state of mind, so much so that they became evildoers.

Let us say that they only became evildoers because there were bad intentions behind their efforts. If they had only put an effort into minimizing miracles, all while placing their trust in Hashem – just as Jacob had done – they would have succeeded. Since they failed to do so, they became corrupt. Our Sages say that Caleb distanced himself from the views of the spies in order to pray by the tomb of the Patriarchs. He said to them, "My fathers, pray on my behalf that I may be delivered from the plan of the spies" (Sotah 34b). Why did Caleb go and pray by the tomb of the Patriarchs? It is because the Patriarchs, even when they put an effort into doing something for themselves, still placed their complete trust in Hashem. Caleb wanted to do the same, which is why he asked for Divine mercy by their tomb.

CONCERNING THE PARSHA

Praying by the Graves of the Tzaddikim

Concerning the statement found in this week's parsha, "They ascended in the south and he arrived at Hebron" (Bamidbar 13:22), the Gemara states: "It should have read 'They arrived.' Raba said: This teaches that Caleb distanced himself from the plan of the spies and went and prostrated himself on the graves of the Patriarchs, saying to them: 'My fathers, pray on my behalf that I may be delivered from the plan of the spies'" (Sotah 34b).

Just as Caleb ben Yephuneh acted, likewise countless among the faithful go and pray by the graves of the Patriarchs or other tzaddikim whenever they experience misfortune or hear good news. The truth is that many conflicting views are found in the works of the poskim with regards to praying or uttering supplications by the graves of the Patriarchs or tzaddikim. Based upon the words of the Gemara, some believe that such practices are permitted and can in no way be considered as an appeal to the dead or a prayer to someone other than Hashem. This also emerges from another statement of the Sages: "Why do they go to the cemetery? ... In order that the dead should intercede for mercy on our behalf" (Ta'anith 16a). We find the same opinion voiced by Rabbi Yochanan: "One should constantly implore mercy so that all may support his efforts in order that he may have no enemies on high" (Sanhedrin 44b). Rashi explains this to mean: "So the ministering angels may help him and ask for Divine mercy on his behalf, in order that he may have no accusers on high."

It is from this point of view that the Sages established formulas for our prayers and selichot (generally found among Ashkenazi selichot). Examples include: "Angels of mercy, servants of the Most High, offer supplication before the Almighty" and "Have mercy and intervene for us and bring our supplications before the Creator." The author of Shibolei HaLeket cites the formulation: "You who bring in mercy," noting that this does not blend the worship of G-d with something else. Rav Brona gives another reason for this custom by noting, "The fact that we say, 'Attribute of Mercy' and 'you who bring in mercy' is a humble way of expressing oneself, like a servant who speaks to the king's advisors, being embarrassed to approach the king himself. This does not constitute an address to intermediaries."

On the other hand, some are opposed to reciting such poetic expressions, including the Maharal. For him, "It is out of the question to pray in this way." In fact the Chatam Sofer testified that he usually avoided such poetic expressions. Hence some of the Acharonim modified these expressions in order not to appear to be addressing intermediaries, only Hashem.

They Have Absolutely No Power

We must know whether it is permissible to ask the souls of the dead to pray for the living. In the Zohar (Parsha Acharei Mot) and in Sefer Chasidim (450), it is written that this in no way constitutes "inquiring of the dead." On the other hand, some warn against addressing the dead at all and making them into an intermediary, even if just to intercede for them, since prayer must be addressed solely to Hashem. It is written in Sefer Halkarim that it is not fitting to ask or hope for any kind of good from anyone besides Hashem. Prayer must be addressed solely to Him, no one else, for why should a person pray to someone who cannot answer him?

In the book Keter Rosh, the gaon Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin writes that on Friday night he would not recite Barchuni leshalom ("Bless me with peace"), nor did he say "angels of mercy, please hear." He avoided saying this because one must not make requests to angels, who do not have the slightest power and possess no free will. All the same, Rabbi Chaim did not reprimand those who recited it.

Salvation Will Come Through Their Suffering

On the custom of praying by the graves of the tzaddikim, the Rema states: "On Erev Rosh Hashanah, in some places the custom is to go to graves and recite many supplications" (Rema 581:4). The Baer Haitev cites the Maharal in explaining this custom, stating that a cemetery is a place where the tzaddikim rest, and as such it is pure and holy, a place where prayer is better heard. One who prays by the graves of the tzaddikim must not address himself to the dead, but must ask Hashem to have pity on him through the merit of the tzaddikim who lie buried there. The Maharam Schick permits prayers by a grave because the dead share in the suffering in the living, meaning that the souls of the dead know what is happening in this world. Hence if the living come to the graves of the dead in a time of trouble, saying that they do not know from where help will come if Heaven does not have mercy on them, the dead will certainly suffer even more. Salvation will then occur through their suffering, for Hashem will have pity on the living by the merit of the dead.

All Comes Through the Power of Wholeheartedness

How amazing are the words of our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita in this regard.

In the introduction to his book Anshei Emunah, he states the following:

"I remember that as a young boy in Morocco, I would always go to the cemetery in order to pray by the graves of my holy ancestors. At the cemetery, I always saw many people who had come to pray by the graves of the tzaddikim and to light candles there. I never asked them what they were doing, and if as a boy I did not ask any questions, how much more today, as an adult, do I refrain from asking why men and women go to pray by the graves of the tzaddikim and to present their requests, having faith that their prayers will be heard.

"This is all because I believe very deeply in the power of prayer by the graves of the tzaddikim. We see this very thing with pure-hearted individuals, for even if they are not great in Torah, the power of their faith in Hashem is such that their prayers are more quickly answered than the prayers of other individuals. Why? The reason is very simple, for everything comes by the power of wholeheartedness.

"Therefore the prayers of such people – those who annul themselves before the tzaddikim and visit rabbis so they can pray for them by the merit of their Torah or by the merit of their holy ancestors – are accepted because of all this: The power of faith, purity and wholeheartedness, the spiritual awakening they possess, and the merit of the tzaddikim's ancestors. Greatly humbling oneself before the tzaddikim and the graves of the tzaddikim constitutes a merit through which prayers are answered."

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE TSADDIK RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA

In the passage concerning the tzitzit, we read: "You shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of Hashem" (Bamidbar 15:39). From here our Sages learn that the mitzvah of tzitzit "is equal to all the precepts put together" (Menachot 43b). We need to understand what is so special about the tzitzit, such that just looking at them is enough to remember all the mitzvot of the Torah.

The Meshech Chochma explains this in detail: "What is there in the mitzvah of tzitzit that reminds man of all Hashem's mitzvot? It is obvious that just looking at the tzitzit is not enough, and every day we notice that simply looking at them does not remind a person of even a single mitzvah."

The Meshech Chochma goes on to say, however, that the tzitzit certainly contain something of profound significance that we must reflect upon. Creation is described as a "garment" (Tikkunei Zohar 59, 93a), and this world has not reached a state of perfection, something that the Creator has left for man to achieve. Through the mitzvah of tzitzit, He is reminding man of this perfection and commands him to achieve it. How? Just as the tzitzit are not complete and kosher unless a garment has four corners – and if a corner is missing, the tzitzit are not valid – the same applies to Creation, which is described as a garment. A man must bring it to perfection through Torah study and mitzvot performance. This is the sense of the expression, "You shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of Hashem." By reflecting upon the mitzvah of tzitzit and its significance, namely that the Creator is encouraging us to usher in perfection, a man will hurry to perform all the mitzvot of Hashem in order to bring about this perfection. This summarizes the remarks of the Meshech Chochma.

According to these remarks, we may say that this is why we cover the dead with a tallit and burial shroud rather than garments, and why we cut the tzitzit on the tallit. It is in order to remind the living that we can only lead things to perfection while we are alive. Happy are we if we do so, and we will merit the garments of the rabbanim in the World to Come.

We can only achieve this when we are still alive. After death, it becomes impossible to perfect anything. This is why we cut the tzitzit, which complete the tallit, a hint to the living that the dead can no longer perfect anything.

This is why the Sages have said, "Repent one day before your death" (Pirkei Avot 2:10). We must bring things to perfection as much as possible while we are still alive, for we will be unable to rectify anything once we are dead. We will then regret all the time that we could have used to rectify things and attain perfection during our lives, time that was wasted for no good reason. We will then mourn the wasted time that will never return.

AT THE SOURCE

Exploring and Spying

“Send for yourself men, veyaturu [that they may explore] the land of Canaan” (Bamidbar 13:2).

The book Ketav VeHaKabbalah explains that in Hebrew, there is a difference between tur (“to explore”) and meragel (“to spy out”). A person who goes to explore the land wants to see what is good and beautiful about it, as the verse states: “Latur [To search out] for them a resting place” (Bamidbar 10:33). Yet one who spies comes to see the shortcomings of the land, what it lacks, as Joseph said to his brothers: “Meraglim atem [You are spies]. You have come to see the nakedness of the land” (Bereshith 42:9).

This is why Moshe, who believed with complete faith that Canaan was a pleasant land, being good and fertile, did not need to send “spies.” His goal was for them to “explore the land of Canaan” to see the good there and to praise it before the Children of Israel in order to encourage and support them before they entered it. Hence it is written, “Moshe sent them latur [to explore] the land” (Bamidbar 13:17).

However the spies (meraglim) had something else in mind, as Moshe testified in his admonishments: “They came to the valley of Eshkol vayeraglu otah [and they spied it out]” (Devarim 1:24). They were looking for shortcomings in the land, in keeping with their own lack of faith, which is why they failed and were punished.

Added Years

It is written, “Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun ‘Joshua’ ” (Bamidbar 13:16).

Moshe prayed, “May G-d save you [yoshiacha] from the counsel of the spies.”

When Joshua was sent to explore the land, he was already 40 years old. Now the Sages have said, “When the majority of a man’s years have passed without sin, he will sin no more” (Yoma 38b). Therefore why did Moshe need to pray for Joshua to be saved from the counsel of the spies and not to sin with them? Half of his life had already passed without sin, and he was given the promise that he would not sin in the future.

The book Gan Raveh answers this question according to a statement in the Gemara: People who die before their time, Heaven gives their remaining years to a talmid chacham who is poor and compassionate.

When Moshe saw the humility of Joshua, he was concerned that half of his life had not yet passed, for it was possible that Heaven was going to add more years to his life, the years of those who had died before their time. Hence Moshe added the letter yud to his name and prayed for him to be saved from the counsel of the spies.

Figs, Grapes, and Pomegranates

It is written, “You shall strengthen yourselves and take from the fruit of the land” (Bamidbar 13:20).

We find in the writings of the Arizal that the mitzvah of the first fruit is meant to rectify the sin of the spies. In fact, since they scorned an exceptional land, this mitzvah was given in order demonstrate love for the land of Israel by bringing the seven fruits that are its glory.

Hence in his book Amira Yaffa, Rabbi Menachem Zemba notes that the Mishnah in Bikkurim mentions the very same fruit that were brought by the spies: “How were the first fruit set aside? A man goes down into his field. He sees a fig...a cluster of grapes...or a pomegranate that ripened” (Bikkurim 3:1). This corresponds to what is written concerning the spies: “They cut down from there a branch with one cluster of grapes...also of the pomegranates and of the figs” (Bamidbar 13:23).

Between Two

It is written, “They cut down from there a branch with one cluster of grapes and carried it on a branch between two” (Bamidbar 13:23).

This is surprising: Why did the spies bring a cluster of grapes on a branch carried “between two” men?

The book Melo HaOmer by Rabbi Leib Tzinz Zatzal explains this by the

words of the Midrash, which states that the spies, who left for a mitzvah, were traveling even on Shabbat and did not fear transgressing the prohibition against techumim.

The question therefore becomes why they allowed themselves to commit this transgression. The answer is that they believed that they were authorized to do so under such important circumstances, for the prohibition against techumim is of rabbinic origin. Yet in regards to the prohibition against carrying on Shabbat, which stems from the Torah itself, how could they allow themselves to transgress it?

Hence the verse tells us that they “carried it on a branch between two.” We know that in regards to the laws of Shabbat, two people who commit a transgression together are exempt (Shabbat 3a). Hence the spies were careful not to transgress the prohibition against carrying on Shabbat, which is a Torah prohibition.

The Vav

It is written, “That place was called the Valley of Eshkol because of the cluster [eshkol]” (Bamidbar 13:24).

Even before the spies reached that place, however, it was still called the Valley of Eshkol! Therefore how can the Torah tell us that it was called by this name because of the cluster of grapes that was picked by the Children of Israel?

The book Talelei Orot cites the Maharil Diskin Zatzal in explaining that there is a difference in pronunciation between the term eshkol with a vav and without it. Once the cluster of grapes was taken, it became the Valley of Eshkol with a vav.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Even if Three People Hear

It seems that if a person has recounted something before three people who are G-d-fearing men, men who are careful not to speak Lashon Harah, what he said is not likely to be revealed. Hence the Torah prohibits any of them from revealing what they heard to others. Even if only one of the three is a G-d-fearing man who is careful not to speak Lashon Harah, it is still forbidden for any of them to reveal what they heard, since there are no longer three individuals who are likely to spread what they heard. It may even be that one of the three is a relative or friend of the person being spoken of, and therefore the same applies in that case as well, for he will certainly not reveal what was said about his relative or friend.

– Chafetz Chaim

THE WORDS OF THE SAGES A FAVORABLE TIME

It is written, “You shall not follow after your heart and after your eyes, by which you go astray” (Bamidbar 15:39).

Rabbi Meir Abuhatzera Zatzal once said that the best and most certain way to elevate oneself in the true fear of Heaven is to be very careful about what one sees and says. He promised that whoever manages to do so will rise to extraordinary levels in the fear of Heaven and the pure service of Hashem.

Furthermore, Rabbi Aharon Roth Zatzal states in his book Shomer Emunim: “When a man is walking in the street and has an opportunity to see something forbidden, but restrains himself and closes his eyes in order not to gaze upon evil, it is a favorable moment in Heaven, and every prayer that he makes to Hashem, it is a segula that he will be answered!”

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI SHIMSHON AARON POLANSKY

The gaon Rabbi Shimshon Aaron Polansky Zatzal, the Rav of the Beit Israel district of Jerusalem, was very young when he became a Rav. He first served as the Rav of the small town of Midovia, near Kiev. Then in the year 5660, he served as the Rav of the city of Teplik in Ukraine's Podolia's region, succeeding the gaon Rabbi Fisher Metz Zatzal, who was named as the Rav of the nearby city of Uman. People attached the name of this city to his own, for Rabbi Shimshon was known as the "Rav of Teplik" until his dying day.

During the First World War, after the Russian Revolution brought the Bolsheviks into power, Rabbi Shimshon experienced terrible hardship. During the civil war that ensued, many Jews from Teplik were slaughtered before his very eyes by armed bandits from Pate-liora and Dinikin. He himself was threatened with death on several occasions. He was saved by someone from his town, Reb Raphael Platnik, who used his entire fortune to ransom him from the hands of these cruel bandits.

For a few years following the Russian Revolution, Rabbi Shimshon continued to direct his community without interference from the authorities. Yet a certain incident prompted him to leave the country as quickly as possible. What happened is the following:

Two residents of Teplik came before him in a din Torah. One of them was the synagogue shamash, while the other earned a living as a butcher. The Rav listened to the arguments of both sides, and after having deeply reflected on the case, he decided in favor of the shamash. A few days later, however, the son of the butcher came to see him and demanded that he reverse his decision, which in his eyes was flawed.

The son of butcher served in the Red Army, and he came to see the Rav with a gun in his hand, making his message perfectly clear. It was the first time that someone in Teplik had dared to oppose Rav Shimshon since he had arrived there more than 20 years earlier. He was not fazed by the threats of the butcher's son, nor did he reverse his decision, which naturally was based on the Halachah. Yet to him, this incident signaled that times had changed, and that Teplik was no longer his natural place.

At the beginning of the year 5683, Rav Shimshon moved to Jerusalem, where he would live for a quarter century. He immediately became used to the life of the Jewish community and the residents of Jerusalem, great Torah figures who recognized his importance and named him as the Rav of the Beit Israel district and its surroundings. He remained there until his dying day, living in poverty and want.

The Holy One, blessed be He, Will Weep With Him

Rabbi Raphael HaCohen Kook Zatzal recounted an amazing act of chesed performed by Rav Shimshon: "One day, while I was living in Jerusalem, the Rav Zatzal came to my home on the eve of Sukkot, at a time when everyone was very busy. He asked me if I would join him right away in performing a great and urgent mitzvah. What had happened? He had heard people speaking about a certain talmid chacham, self-effacing and great in Torah, whose kitchen was bare. He simply had nothing to eat for the holidays. 'Come quickly and together we can gather some money for him,' he begged me.

"A little perplexed, a naïve question escaped my lips: 'Now? At this very instant? I still haven't had any time to choose the aravot or finish decorating the sukkah. Why don't we wait until a little later?' However the Rav did not let me continue: 'Does the Holy One, blessed be He, worry that we will have the best among the four species? Even if we have none at all, people such as ourselves will perform the mitzvah to perfection, going to synagogue and reciting the blessing on the etrog and the lulav of others. However if this poor person sits down starving in his sukkah and sheds but a single tear, the Holy One, blessed be He, will weep with him.'

"I immediately left everything that I was doing at that point, and together we went to collect money for him."

Another story is told in this regard: One of Rabbi Shimshon's students was Dr. Mordechai Eliash, who every three months would give him funds to distribute to tzeddakah. Rabbi Shimshon did not take a single penny of this money for himself, but distributed all of it to Jerusalem's poor. One day a grandson of Rav Shimshon saw that he was sending a double portion to a certain family, and he asked him why. He gave the boy the following explanation: "When I escaped the pogroms in Russia, we were very hungry. The man to whom I am now sending money was responsible for distributing tzeddakah at the time, but he gave me nothing. Now the wheel has turned, and I am the one distributing tzeddakah while he is the one receiving it. In order not to commit a sin, I am sending him a more generous amount. In this way I will not be reprimanded in the World of Truth for having taken revenge."

By the Merit of the Ohr HaChaim

Rav Shimshon expressed special affection for the Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh, whose writings he knew by heart. On Friday nights he would teach Chumash along with the Ohr HaChaim in the Beit Yaakov synagogue of the Beit Israel district. For many years, he would recite it from memory just as well as from a book, and people would attentively listen to his marvelous explanations.

Whenever he was asked to pray for the sick, or similar requests, he would go to the grave of the Ohr HaChaim on the Mount of Olives, and there he would pour out his heart in prayer and supplications. When he was later told some good news, that a sick person had been healed or that somebody had been saved from a misfortune, he would say: "See how great his power is? It is all by the merit of the Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh."

As Strong as Samson and as Peace-Loving as Aaron

Upon his death on Sivan 28, 5708, bombs from Jordan's armed forces lit up the skies of Jerusalem, preventing the residents of the city from giving him a fitting eulogy. His funeral was approved in the Sanhedria cemetery on the Mount of Olives, where he had acquired a grave during his lifetime. The feeling of being orphaned filled the residents of Jerusalem, who felt the deep void left by his passing. The gaon Rabbi Yosef Shaul Elishar Zatzal, the grandson of the Rishon Letzion (the author of Isa Beracha), perfectly summed up his greatness in single phrase: "Our teacher was as strong as Samson in Torah and as peace-loving as Aaron."