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| וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: שְׁלַח־לְךָ אַנְשִׁים וַיִּתְּרוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ כְּנָעַן... בְּמִי יֵגֵא-בֹ | God spoke to Moshe, saying: Send for yourself men, that they may scout out the land of Canaan Num. 13:1-2 |
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Send for yourself men.
 We have seen this formulation of command before.

Most notably when God says to Abraham, **לך לך** - **Go for yourself** (Gen. 12:1) or, **עשה לך** - **Make for yourself**, when God commands Noah to make the ark. Or, **לך ברה** - **Escape for yourself** when Rivka instructs Jacob to run away from Esau. And many more. In each instance we get the sense that there is self-interest in what is being asked of the individual. Each instance then, raises the interpretive question: why the extra word **for-yourself**? How does it augment or intensify the verb in each case? And here, what's the hidden story behind **לך**? Rashi asks this question, and his answer is astounding.

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| שְׁלַח לְךָ. לְדַעְתְּךָ. אֲנִי אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה לְךָ. אִם תִּרְצֶה, שְׁלַח. | Send for yourself. (Send them) based on your opinion. I, I am not commanding you. If you want to, send (them). |
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In other words, God is giving Moses the choice

whether to send the scouts or not. **It's up to you. I'm not telling you what to do here. You want to send them, go ahead and send them. If you don't want to send them, don't send them. I'm leaving it up to you.** Why would God leave the decision up to Moses? Well, we need to insert a missing piece into the story. When Moses recounts this episode in Deuteronomy (some 38 years from this moment) he states that the people actually approached him and asked to send the scouts into the land. Here's the verse:

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| וַתִּקְרְבוּן אֵלַי כָּלְכֶם (וַתֹּאמְרוּ) נִשְׁלַח אַנְשִׁים לְפָנֵינוּ וַיִּחְפְּרוּ־לָנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וַיָּשֻׁבוּ אֵתְנוּ דְבָר אֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁלַח־בָּהּ וְאֵת הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר נָבֵא אֵלֵינוּ: דְּבִ אֶ-כֹּב | Then you came near to me, all of you, and said: Let us send men before us that they may explore the land for us and return us word about the route that we should [use to] go up to it, and about the towns that we will come to. Deut. 1:22 |
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So then the full story is that that first the people approached Moses to send scouts to the land, and then Moses turned to God for a consultation and then God basically said, **It's up to you.** Which is, when you think of it, a fascinating way for God to answer this query. Fascinating because God is usually quite clear about what He wants from humanity. But here, He's leaving it up to them. Why? Well, consider the parent who is being consulted by their child on a deeply important matter, like, *where should I go to school?* Or, *do you think I should marry this person?* When the parent decides and things go awry, the child will blame the parent because the parent made the decision. Likewise, here God is giving Moses and the people responsibility for their own decisions and the consequences of those decisions. By enabling (empowering) Moses to make the decision, God validates Moses' leadership and avoids blame if things go awry. To Moses, the decision to send the scouts may have been relatively easy. After

all, Moses knew that the land was a good land because God told him so at the Burning Bush:

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| וְאָרַד לְהַצִּילוֹן מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּלְהַעֲלוֹתוֹ מִיַּד הָאָרֶץ הַהִיא אֶל־אָרֶץ טוֹבָה וְרַחְבָּה אֶל־אָרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ... שְׁמִי ג':ח | So I have come down to rescue the people from the hand of Egypt, to bring it up from that land to a land, goodly and spacious, to a land flowing with milk and honey... Exod. 3:8 |
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God also told Moses that there was a deep covenantal connection to the land, because of Israel's ancestors who dwelled there:

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| וְגַם הִקְמַתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּם לָתֵת לָהֶם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֶת אֶרֶץ מִגְרֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר־יָגְרוּ בָּהּ: שְׁמוֹת ו':ד | I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings, where they had sojourned. Exod. 6:4 |
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Moses would have had every confidence that a) the scouts would have experienced the **good land** and b) would have had some emotional experience of pilgrimage given that they were going to see the land where their ancestors had dwelt. (We have all experienced that on our travels to Israel. Surely, they would have had some excitement upon seeing the places where their ancestors lived. No?) But you never can be sure. And that's what Rashi states at the end of his comment on this verse:



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| אָמַר, אֶמְרֵתִי לָהֶם שֶׁהִיא טוֹבָה... חַיֵּיהֶם! שְׂאֵנִי נוֹתֵן לָהֶם מְקוֹם לְטָעוֹת בְּדַבְרֵי מְרַגְלִים, לְמַעַן לֹא יִרְשׁוּהָ (תנחומא): | (Upon consultation with Moses) God said: I already told them that it's a good land... By their lives! Let it be that I give them ample room to err (in following) the words of the spies such that they will not inherit the land. (Rashi on Num. 13:12 adapted from Midrash Tanhuma.) |
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To paraphrase, God is saying: **I told them that it was a good land. But evidently, they don't believe me. I told them that it was the land of their ancestors. But evidently, that doesn't interest them. They want to check it out for themselves. Okay. Fine. If that's what they want, go ahead and do that. But know that there is always a possibility for failure. And that possibility seriously exists here.** This is a punch to the gut. In this theology, God's response to Moses, **שְׁלַח־לְךָ** - is a set up for failure. One could argue that this is a form of tough love. But the stakes are so high here. And tough love, even from God has its consequences.

Another Interpretation: A totally different perspective comes from Ramban, Nachmanides. Writing in response to the cruel sentiment that is evinced by Rashi, he challenges the notion that God's command, **שְׁלַח־לְךָ**, is a set-up for failure. It's quite a long comment, but here is money quote:

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| <p>מִשֵּׁה, בַּעֲבוּר שִׂידֵעַ כִּי הִיא שְׂמֵנָה...בַּעֲבוּר כֵּן, אָמַר לָהֶם שִׂיתְנוּ לֵב לְדַעַת כֵּן כְּדֵי שִׂיגִידוּ לָעַם וַיִּשְׂמְחוּ וַיַּחֲלִיפוּ כַּח לְעֹלֹת שֵׁם בַּשְּׂמֵחָה.</p> | <p>¹Because Moses knew that the land was rich and good...because of that, he said to them, that they should ascertain this themselves, ²in order that they would be able to tell the people, and the people would rejoice, and they would muster their strength to go up their in joy.</p> |
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In other words, for Ramban the mission was not a set-up for a failure. It was not a test in the sense that God was testing their faith. Rather, it was a mission not only to get the specific information necessary for the conquest, but to create a leadership cohort that would be able to shape public opinion to successfully accomplish the task that was ahead. *I am sending you because I know that this is a good land, and I want you to see that yourselves, and I want you to come back and encourage the people, get them psyched up for the amazing challenges that we have ahead.* Ramban specifically points to the instruction of coming back with samples of the land's luscious fruit. Moses tells them, **וְהִתְחַזְּקוּם וְלִקְחֶתֶם מִפְּרֵי הָאָרֶץ - Strengthen each other, and take from the fruit of the land (13:20)** which is almost like a coach saying to his team, *Come on you guys! You can do it! Go there and keep your spirits up, it's a long trip, and make sure you come back with visual evidence for the people of how wonderful the land is. They need that.* Ramban's explanation:

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| <p>כְּדֵי שִׂירְאוּ בְּעֵינֵיהֶם ... בִּשְׂבַח הָאָרֶץ ... שִׂיגִידוּ לָהֶם כֹּל עֲנִינֵי הָאָרֶץ לְשִׂמְחָה בַּמַּעֲלוֹתֶיהָ כִּי יוֹדַע הָיָה בָהֶם.</p> | <p>(Moses wanted them) to see the wonder of the land with their own eyes,... ³Therefore Moses wanted the scouts to report back to the people all of the details of the land in order to cause them to rejoice in its splendors, because he himself knew of them.</p> |
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That's such a different idea. Rashi: God is setting you up for failure. Ramban: God is setting you up for the joy and excitement of this great next chapter in your destiny! What are we to make of these two opinions? They are totally different. And yet they reflect two different ways of approaching the challenge that is ahead. Rashi reflects realism and explains this moment in light of the subsequent failure of the scouts. Knowing how the story ends, he sees how doomed it was from the very moment the orders were issued. Ramban reflects idealism and explains this moment in light of what *could have been* had the scouts internalized Moses' enthusiasm and joy for the journey ahead. What was the reason for the failure and the collapse of public support for the conquest? Perhaps both Rashi and Ramban would agree that it was because the people, and especially their leaders, with the exception of Joshua and Calev, still had the mentality of slaves. The fear, humiliation and dependency on their oppressors, left them with deep psychological scars that could not be overcome even with all that they had experienced up until now. The conquest of the land would require a new generation that grew up in freedom.

Tzitzit. The parasha concludes with the commandment of tzitzit familiar to us as it is the third paragraph in the daily recitation of the Shema. The most significant feature of the tzitzit is the blue fringe **וַנִּתְּנוּ עָלֵי צִיצֵת הַכֹּהֵן פְּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת: you are to put on the corner tassel a thread of blue-violet.** This blue-violet color, also known as Tyrian Purple, originated in the 14th century BCE in the eastern Mediterranean, and because of its beauty and durability, it became associated with luxury, wealth, royalty and power. Not so in Judaism. In a subtle rebuttal to the prevailing opinion of his

time regarding the beauty and preciousness of תְּכֵלֶת, R. Meir interprets its significance as follows:

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| <p>אָמַר רַבִּי מֵאִיר: מָה גִשְׁתַּנְּהָ תְּכֵלֶת מִכָּל מֵינֵי צְבָעוֹנִים. שֶׁהַתְּכֵלֶת דּוּמָה לַיָּם וַיּוֹם דּוּמָה לְרִקִּיעַ וְהָרִקִּיעַ דּוּמָה לְכֶסֶף הַקְּבוֹד.</p> | <p>R Meir said: How different tekhelet (blue/purple) is from all the other colors! Tekhelet resembles the sea, and the sea resembles the firmament, and the firmament resembles the Seat of Glory.</p> |
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It's nice to point out that the expression **מָה גִשְׁתַּנְּהָ** is not only found in the Haggadah. Dazzled by its beauty and its similarity to the colors of the heavens and the seas, R. Meir detaches its symbolism from human royalty, and has תְּכֵלֶת symbolize the **One Royal Sovereign of the Universe.** It's God's color. He continues:

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| <p>וּמִתּוֹךְ שֶׁהוּא רוֹאֶה אוֹתוֹ זֹכֵר אֶת קוֹנוֹ</p> | <p>Thus when someone looks at it, he (or she) remembers their Maker.</p> |
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and then he recalls the verse in Exodus which describes how Israel beheld the heavenly sight, **כַּמַּעֲשֵׂה לְבִנְתֵי הַסַּפִּיר - that it was like the work of sapphire tiles, something like the substance of the heavens in purity** (Exod. 24:10). In other words, wearing the blue fringe and then looking at it, not only is supposed to make you remember the mitzvot, as the text states, but it is to make you remember God. The dye was processed from the secretions of the gland of a specific species of murex snail (murex brandaris, *hilazon* in Hebrew) and because it was so precious and expensive, and difficult to produce, it was also in high demand. To preserve its dominion over this precious commodity, the Roman Empire (circa mid 5th century CE) imposed a ban over its use by ordinary citizens and subjects, restricting its use to the elites of Roman society, royalty and political leaders. Unauthorized use of the dye was akin to treason and was met with severe penalties, even death. While Jews continued to use the dye clandestinely, often at great risk, it became much harder to obtain. Knowing that the manufacture of the dye was culturally and economically important to the Romans, when the Arabs conquered the region, they destroyed all of the manufacturing infrastructure resulting in the loss of the dye. (~6-7th century CE). A midrash from that time gives evidence for that and the result that it had for the mitzvah of tzitzit:



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| <p>מִצְוָה לְהִבִּיאַ לָבוֹן וְתְכֵלֶת וַיַּעֲשֵׂה. אֵימָתִי כִשְׂיֵהָ תְּכֵלֶת. וְעַכְשָׁיו, אֵין לָנוּ אֵלָא לָבוֹן שֶׁהַתְּכֵלֶת נִגְנוּ מִצְוָה בְּלָבוֹן. תַּנְחומָא שְׁלַח ט"ו</p> | <p>It is the mitzvah to take white and blue threads and make tzitzit. When? When there is tekhelet. But now, since we only have white because the tekhelet is "hidden", the mitzvah is to do it with white. Tanhuma (7th century) Shlach 15</p> |
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Since the mid-19th century various individuals within the Jewish world have undertaken a mission to rediscover and renew the practice of **tekhelet**. Rabbi Yitzhak Halevi Herzog, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi (and grandfather/namesake of the current President of the State of Israel, Yitzhak 'Bougie' Herzog) was instrumental in the *quest for the holy snail*. Today, the use of תְּכֵלֶת is more widespread and it is not uncommon to see people wearing tallitot with blue tzitzit. But if you still have white tzitzit, that's okay too! You will just be missing out on Rabbi Meir's mystical experience. Shabbat Shalom!

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| <p>This week's Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Barbara and Stephen Parkoff in honor of the Kibel and Parkoff Anniversaries! Mazel Tov!</p> |
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