

“Bnei Yisrael were in the wilderness and they found a man gathering wood.” (15:32)

In directing the spies where to investigate the land, Moshe Rabbeinu instructs them to confirm whether “there are trees in it or not.” Rashi defines the word tree as a reference to an adam kasher, a decent, righteous man who would protect Canaan’s inhabitants through his merit. Eitz, tree, is an allusion to a pious, upright man in whose merit a community, or an individual is sustained. In order to receive the merit of the tzaddik, however, one must be machshiv, recognize, value and appreciate the tzaddik. If he “knocks” every Torah scholar; if he determines who is a scholar and who is not, we cannot expect the tzaddik’s merit to preserve him in his time of need.

Horav Meir, z.l., m’Premishlan suggests that the mekoshesh eitzim, gatherer of wood, is a metaphor for selecting and determining who is an “eitz” and who is not. The mekoshesh denigrated tzaddikim. He decided who was worthy of being an “eitz”. How can one who degrades tzaddikim expect to be sustained by them? Accordingly, he was not.