

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Shlach

*Numbers 13:1-15:41**Torah Reading for Week of June 2-June 8, 2002*

"Send you, men" says G-d to Moses in the opening verses of this week's Parshah, "that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel."

Moses sends twelve men—one from each of the twelve tribes of Israel—"every one a prince among them"m"

Moses' faithful disciple, Hosea the son of Nun, is the spy for the tribe of Ephraim. Before he goes, Moses adds the letter yud to his name, renaming him "Joshua" ("G-d shall save").

And he said to them: "Go up this way by the Negev ('south'), and go up into the high land.

"And see the land, what it is; and the people who dwell

in it, whether they are strong or weak, few or many. And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it is good or bad; and what cities they dwell in, whether in the open, or in strongholds. And what the land is, whether fat or lean, whether there are trees in it, or not.

"And be of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land."

Now the time was the time of the first ripening of grapes.

An Evil Report

So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rechov on the way to Hamat.

They went up into the Negev; and he came to Hebron. And there were the giants Achiman, Sheshai and Talmai...

And they came to the wadi of Eshkol, and cut down from there a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they carried on a pole, by twos; and they brought of the pomegranates, and the figs...

Commentary

SEND YOU MEN (NUMBERS 13:2)

"Send you" — as your mind dictates. I am not instructing you; if you so desire, send. For the people of Israel had come to Moses, saying "Let us send men before us", as it is written (Deuteronomy 1:22), "And you all approached me..."; and Moses consulted with G-d. Said G-d: I have said that it is a good land... By your life, I shall now give you the option to err...

(Rashi; Talmud)

AND MOSES NAMED HOSEA... JOSHUA ("G-D SHALL SAVE") (13:16)

He prayed for him: May G-d save you from the counsel of the Spies.

(Talmud, Sotah 34b; Rashi)

AND MOSES NAMED HOSEA... JOSHUA (13:16)

The letter yud, which had been removed from Sarai's name (when she was renamed "Sarah"—cf. Genesis 17:15), was soaring and flying before the Divine throne all those years, and saying before G-d: "Because I am the smallest of the letters, I was taken out of the righteous Sarah?" Until she was added to Joshua.

(Midrash Rabbah)

David pleaded before G-d: "Sovereign of the Universe! Who can

understand his errors?" G-d : "They are forgiven you." ... Implored David: "May my sin (i.e., the incident of Bathsheba) not be recorded in the Torah." Said G-d: "That is impossible. If the single letter yud I removed from Sarai continuously protested for many years until Joshua came and I added it to his name... how much more so a complete section in Torah!"

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 107a)

GO UP BY THE NEGEV (13:17)

That was the dross of the land. Such is the manner of merchants: first they show the lesser-quality merchandise, and then they show the prime merchandise.

(Rashi; Midrash Tanchuma)

AND SEE THE LAND, WHAT IT IS (13:18)

Of what sort is it. For there are lands that produce strong people, and lands that produce weak people; lands that produce large populations, and lands that produce small populations.

(Rashi; Midrash Tanchuma)

AND THEY WENT UP... AND HE CAME UNTO HEBRON (13:22)

Should it not have read "and they came"? But it was Caleb alone who went to Hebron, to pray at the graves of the Patriarchs, that he not be enticed to join in the conspiracy of the spies. Thus it is written (Deuteronomy 1:36), "And to him (Caleb) I shall give the land upon which he trod"; and it says (Judges 1:20): "And to Caleb they gave

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Shlach

Numbers 13:1-15:41

Torah Reading for Week of June 2-June 8, 2002

And they returned from searching the land after forty days.

They show the people the magnificent fruits they brought, and say:

"We came to the land where you did send us, and indeed it flows with milk and honey; and this is its fruit.

"But the people that dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified, and very great; and moreover we saw the giants there.

"Amalek dwells in the land of the Negev, the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Emorites dwell in the mountain; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and by the side of the Jordan."

Caleb, the spy from the tribe of Judah, interrupts his colleagues and silences the murmuring people to cry out: "We shall go up and possess it! For we are well able to achieve it."

But the men who went up with him said: "We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we."

And they spread an evil report of the land which they had spied out to the children of Israel, saying: "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that consumes up its inhabitants..."

"And there we saw the Nefilim, the giants, descendents of the fallen ones. And we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."

The People Weep

And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, and the whole congregation said to

Commentary

Hebron" (as his portion in the Land of Israel).

(Rashi; Talmud, Sotah 34b)

AND THEY CARRIED ON A POLE, BY TWOS (13:23)

They hung it from two poles, each with two men at each end. Thus it required eight men to carry the cluster of grapes; one carried a fig, and one a pomegranate. Joshua and Caleb did not carry back fruit, for the whole purpose of it was to defame the land: as its fruit is abnormal, so are its inhabitants abnormally large and strong.

(Rashi)

WE CAME TO THE LAND WHERE YOU DID SEND US, AND INDEED IT FLOWS WITH MILK AND HONEY... (13:26)

Such is the way of defamers: they start off by saying something good, and conclude by saying evil.

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Meir: Any piece of slander which has not some truth in the beginning, will not endure in the end.

(Midrash Rabbah; Talmud)

WE ARE NOT ABLE TO GO UP AGAINST THE PEOPLE; FOR THEY ARE STRONGER THAN WE (13:30)

They said this even regarding G-d Himself (the Hebrew word mimenu, "than we", can also mean "from he"): Even He cannot remove them from there.

(Talmud; Rashi)

IT IS A LAND THAT CONSUMES ITS INHABITANTS (13:32)

What was the reason that the Spies, who were leaders of Israel and men of lofty stature, did not want to enter the Land?

The explanation of the matter is as follows:

A great majority of the physical mitzvot can be implemented only in the Land of Israel, especially the agricultural laws and the laws of the offerings brought to the Holy Temple... The Spies, who were on a most lofty spiritual level, did not wish to lower themselves to the level of physical action, preferring to remain in the desert, where they received all their needs from above, and related to G-d by means of the loftier levels of thought and speech (i.e., study of Torah and prayer). They desired to draw down all the Divine emanations into the "Land of Israel" that exists in the realm of Malchut, the world of Divine speech, where there also is a "Jerusalem" and a "Holy Temple." Regarding the physical Land of Israel, they said: "It is a land that consumes its inhabitants"—if the Divine light were to be drawn down into the physical world, our entire existence would be nullified.

But Joshua and Caleb said, "The Land is very, very good." It is specifically in the Land of Israel down below, and specifically by means of the mitzvot implemented by physical action, that the truly infinite light of G-d is drawn down—a light that includes both the spiritual and the material, which is why it is "very, very" good.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

IT IS A LAND THAT CONSUMES ITS INHABITANTS (13:32)

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Shlach

*Numbers 13:1-15:41**Torah Reading for Week of June 2-June 8, 2002*

them: "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would we had died in this desert! And why has G-d brought us to this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return to Egypt?"

And they said to one another: "Let us appoint a chief, and let us return to Egypt."

Only Caleb and Joshua call on the people to trust in G-d's ability to bring them into the land.

"How long will this people provoke Me?" says G-d to Moses. "How long will they not believe in Me, for all the signs which I have performed among them?"

"I will smite them with the pestilence and annihilate them; and I will make of you a nation greater and

mightier than they."

Forty Years

Once again, Moses intercedes on behalf of his people: "If you shall kill all this people as one man," he argues before G-d, "then the nations which have heard the fame of You will speak, saying: Because G-d was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore to them, therefore He has slain them in the wilderness."

Then he evokes the Divine attributes of mercy:

And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, according as You have spoken, saying: G-d is long-suffering, and great in love, forgiving iniquity and transgression...

Pardon, I pray, the sin of this people according to the greatness of Your love, and as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now.

And once again, Moses prevails.

And G-d said: I have forgiven according to your word.

Commentary

The Hebrew word for "its inhabitants" in this verse, yoshvehah, literally means "its settlers".

Thus Chassidic master Rabbi Yitzchak of Varka explained the deeper significance of this statement: the Holy Land does not tolerate those who settle down, content with their achievements...

WE SAW THERE THE NEFILIM, THE GIANTS DESCENDED OF THE FALLEN ONES (13:33)

The descendents of Shamchazi and Azael, who fell from heaven in the generation of Enosh.

(Rashi)

When the generation of the Flood took to worshipping idols and G-d was saddened, there arose two angels, Shamchazi and Azael, who said to Him: "Master of the Universe! Did we not say to You, when You created Your world, 'What is man that You make mention of him'?"

Said G-d: "And the world—what shall become of it?"

Said they: "Master of the Universe! We would suffice for it."

Said G-d: "It is known and revealed to Me that if you dwelled upon earth the Evil Inclination would dominate you and you would be worse than the sons of man."

Said they: "Allow us to dwell among the humans, and You we shall see that we sanctify Your name!"

Said G-d: "Descend and dwell amongst them."

Immediately they were corrupted.

(Yalkut Shimoni, Bereshit 44)

AND THE PEOPLE WEPT THAT NIGHT (14:1)

On the ninth of Av it was decreed that our fathers should not enter the Promised Land.

For we know that the children of Israel decamped from Mount Sinai on the 20th of Iyar (Numbers 10:11), and set forth on a three days' journey (ibid. 10:33), following which they ate the quail for thirty days (ibid. 11:20). That brings us up to the 22nd of Sivan. Then Miriam was secluded outside of the camp for seven days (ibid. 12:15), following which Moses sent the Spies (ibid. 13:1). Thus the Spies went out on the 29th of Sivan. And it is written, "And they returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days." The month of Tammuz was a "full" month (of 30 days) that year, meaning that they returned on the 8th of Av. And it is further written, "And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night." Rabbah said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: That night was the night of the ninth of Av. Said G-d to them: You have wept without cause, therefore I will set aside this day for a weeping throughout the generations to come.

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Shlach

*Numbers 13:1-15:41**Torah Reading for Week of June 2-June 8, 2002*

I shall not destroy them, says G-d. However, this generation will not see the Promised Land.

Say to them: As I live, says G-d, as you have spoken in My ears, so will I do to you.

Your carcasses shall fall in this desert; and all that were numbered of you... from twenty years old and upward, who have murmured against me, shall not come into the land of which I swore to make you dwell there. Except Caleb the son of Yefuneh, and Joshua the son of

Nun.

Your little ones, who, you said, should be a prey—they will I bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this desert..

And your children shall wander in the desert forty years.... According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land—forty days—for each day a year, for each day a year, shall you bear your iniquities: forty years.....

G-d instructs Moses to turn back, away from the Land of Canaan, and go back into the desert. The ten evil-reporting Spies die in a plague.

When Moses conveys G-d's words to the people, they are filled with remorse. Now they are prepared to enter the Promised Land despite all, even in defiance of the

Commentary

(Talmud, Taanit 29b)

Five misfortunes befell our fathers on the ninth of Av: it was decreed that our fathers should not enter the Promised Land, the Temple was destroyed the first and second time, Betar was captured, and the city (Jerusalem) was ploughed up.

*(Ibid., 26b)***LET THE POWER OF MY LORD BE GREAT, ACCORDING AS YOU HAVE SPOKEN, SAYING: G-D IS LONG-SUFFERING... (14:17-18)**

When Moses ascended to heaven, he found G-d sitting and writing “long-suffering.” Said Moses to G-d: “Master of the Universe! Long-suffering to the righteous?” Said G-d: “Also to the wicked.” Said Moses: “Let the wicked perish!” Said G-d: “See now that you will need this.” When Israel sinned, G-d said to Moses: “Did you not tell Me to be long-suffering only toward the righteous?” Said Moses to Him: “Did You not say to me, ‘Also to the wicked’?”

*(Talmud, Sanhedrin 111a)***AND G-D SPOKE TO MOSES, SAYING: SPEAK TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, AND SAY TO THEM... (15:1-2)**

At that time, G-d said to Moses: “Go appease them, the poor fellows, as their heart has departed them.”

Said Moses: “Master, how shall I appease them?”

Said He: “Appease them with words of Torah: ‘When you come into the land... And you shall make a fire-offering to G-d...’”

*(Seder Eliyahu Rabbah)***WHEN YOU COME INTO THE LAND... (15:2)**

He reassured them that they will, in the end, enter the Land.

*(Rashi)***AND THEY FOUND A MAN GATHERING STICKS (15:32)**

The gatherer was Tzelaphchad (whose daughters petitioned Moses to receive his share in the Land—cf. Numbers 27)... this is Rabbi Akiva's view. Said Rabbi Judah ben Beteira to him: “Akiva! In either case you will be called to task. If you are right, the Torah shielded him, while you reveal him! And if not, you cast a stigma upon a righteous man.”

*(Talmud, Shabbat 96b)***AND THEY FOUND A MAN GATHERING STICKS ON THE SABBATH DAY (15:32)**

The Torah relates the shame of Israel, in that they all kept only the first Shabbat, and on the second Shabbat, this one came and violated it.

(Rashi; Talmud)

His intention was for the sake of Heaven. For the people of Israel were saying that since it had been decreed that they will not enter the Land because of the incident of the Spies, they are no longer obligated to keep the Mitzvot. So he went and violated the Shabbat so that he should be killed, and others should see.

(Tosafot, Bava Batra 119b)

Thus he did not truly sin, since “a work that is not needed for its product” (as in the case of one who digs a pit but has no use for its earth) does not constitute “work” (melachah) that is in violation of the

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Shlach

Numbers 13:1-15:41

Torah Reading for Week of June 2-June 8, 2002

Divine decree.

"It shall not succeed," says Moses to them. "Go not up, for G-d is not among you; so that you may not be smitten before your enemies. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you shall fall by the sword... G-d will not be with you."

But they presumed to go up to the hill top; but the ark of the covenant of G-d, and Moses, departed not out of the camp.

Commentary

Shabbat. Nevertheless, the court executed him, for a judge can only judge by what he sees, not by the intentions of the heart.

(Maharsha, *ibid.*)

AND THEY THAT FOUND HIM GATHERING STICKS BROUGHT HIM TO MOSES (15:33)

This teaches us that a person is not executed for a capital offense unless he is first warned by the witnesses, and then proceeds with the deed despite the warning. (Since the Torah twice emphasizes that "they found him gathering"—i.e., he continued gathering even after they found him doing so).

(Talmud, *Sanhedrin 40b; Rashi*)

AND THEY SHALL PUT UPON THE FRINGE OF EACH CORNER A THREAD OF BLUE (15:38)

Abaye inquired of Rabbi Samuel ben Rav Judah: How do you dye the blue thread?

He replied: We take the blood of the chillazon together with other ingredients and put them all in a pot and boil them together. Then we take out a small amount in an egg-shell and test it on a piece of wool; and we throw away what remains in the egg-shell and burn the wool. One can infer three things from this: 1) that the dye used for testing is unfit; 2) that the dyeing must be for the specific purpose of the mitzvah; and 3) that the dye used for testing renders the rest unfit...

Our Rabbis taught: The chillazon resembles the sea in its color, and in shape it resembles a fish; it comes up from the sea once in seventy years, and with its blood one dyes the blue thread; and therefore it is so expensive...

Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites who dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and routed them as far as Chormah.

More Mitzvot

In the aftermath of the incident of the Spies, G-d instructs Moses on a series of mitzvot to be observed "When you come into the land into which I bring you."

The *menachot* are meal, wine and oil offerings that are to accompany all animal offerings brought to G-d in the Holy Temple. (A 1/10 of an *efah* of meal, 1/4 of a *hin* of oil and a 1/4 *hin* of wine for a lamb; 2 tenths of an *efah* of meal and a third of a *hin* of both oil and wine for a ram; and 3/10 of an *efah* of meal and 1/2 of a *hin* of the oil and of the wine for cattle.)

A portion of the dough, called *challah*, is to be separat-

If one cannot obtain blue threads, he should insert all white threads.

(Talmud, *Menachot 38b-44a*)

Why is blue specified from all the varieties of colors? Because blue resembles the sea, and the sea resembles heaven, and heaven resembles the Divine throne, as it is written (Exodus 24:10): "And they saw the G-d of Israel, and His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, as the very heaven for clearness."

(Talmud, *Sotah 17a*)

AND IT SHALL BE TO YOU AS FRINGES; AND YOU SHALL SEE IT (15:39)

Said Rabbi Meir: it does not say, "and you shall see them," but "and you shall see Him" (the Hebrew *Otto*, also translates as "him"). This teaches that every one who fulfills the mitzvah of tzitzit, it is as if he has greeted the face of the Divine Presence. For the blue thread resembles the sea, the sea resembles grasses, grasses resemble the sky, and the sky resembles the Divine throne.

(Jerusalem Talmud, *Berachot 1:2*)

AND YOU SHALL SEE... AND YOU SHALL REMEMBER... AND YOU SHALL DO (15:39)

Sight brings on memory, and memory brings deed.

(Talmud, *Menachot 43b*)

AND YOU SHALL SEE IT... AND YOU SHALL SEEK NOT AFTER YOUR HEART AND YOUR EYES, AFTER WHICH YOU GO ASTRAY. (15:39)

There was once a man who was very scrupulous about the precept of tzitzit. One day he heard of a certain harlot overseas who took four hundred gold dinars for her hire. He sent her four hundred gold dinars and appointed a day with her. When the day arrived he came and waited at her door, and her maid came and told her, "That man who sent you four hundred gold dinars is here and waiting at the door"; to which she

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Shlach

Numbers 13:1-15:41

Torah Reading for Week of June 2-June 8, 2002

ed and consecrated to G-d when making bread.

Some of the laws of the various sin offerings (recounted in the book of Leviticus) are repeated as well.

The Stick Gatherer

The children of Israel were in the desert. And they found a man gathering sticks upon the Sabbath day.

And they that found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. And they put him in custody, because it was not declared what should be done to him.

And G-d said to Moses: "The man shall be surely put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." And all the congregation brought

him outside the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as G-d commanded Moses.

Tzitzit

"Speak to the children of Israel," says G-d to Moses, "and tell to them that they make themselves fringes (*tzitzit*) in the corners of their garments throughout their generations."

And they shall put upon the fringe of each corner a thread of blue.

And it shall be to you as fringes; and you shall see it, and remember all the commandments of G-d, and do them; and that you seek not after your heart and your eyes, after which you go astray. That you may remember, and do all My commandments, and be holy to your G-d.

I am G-d your G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your G-d: I am G-d your G-d

Commentary

replied Let him come in. When he came in she prepared for him seven beds, six of silver and one of gold; and between one bed and the other there were steps of silver, but the last were of gold. She then went up to the top bed and lay down upon it naked. He too went up after her in his desire to sit naked with her, when all of a sudden the four fringes of his garment struck him across the face; whereupon he slipped off and sat upon the ground. She also slipped off and sat upon the ground and said, "By the Roman Capitol, I will not let you go until you tell me what blemish you saw in me." "I swear," he replied, "that never have I seen a woman as beautiful as you. But there is one precept which our G-d has commanded us, it is called tzitzit, and with regard to it the expression "I am the L-rd your G-d" is twice written, signifying: I am He who will exact punishment in the future, and I am He who will give reward in the future. Now the tzitzit appeared to me as four witnesses." Said she: "I will not leave you until you tell me your name, the name of your town, the name of your teacher, the name of your school in which you study the Torah." He wrote all this down and handed it to her. Thereupon she arose and divided her wealth into three parts; one third for the government, one third to be distributed among the poor, and one third she took with her in her hand; the bed clothes, however, she retained. She then came to the study hall of Rabbi Chiyya, and said to him: "Master, give instructions about me that they make me a pro-se-lyte" ... Those very bed-clothes which she had spread for him for an illicit purpose she now spread out for him lawfully.

(Talmud, Menachot 44a)

Deducing from this Rabbi [Judah HaNassi] taught: One may not drink out of one goblet and think of another (i.e., one should not think of another woman when with his wife). Ravina said: Even when both are his wives.

(Talmud, Nedarim 20b)

THAT YOU MAY REMEMBER, AND DO ALL MY COMMANDMENTS, AND BE HOLY TO YOUR G-D (15:40)

The strings of the tzitzit are comparable to the case of one who has been thrown into the water, and the captain stretches out a rope and says to him: "Take hold of this rope with your hand and do not let go; for if you let go, you have not life!" In the same way, G-d said to Israel: "As long as you adhere to the commandments, then, "You who cleave unto the L-rd your G-d are alive every one of you this day" (Deuteronomy 4:4). In the same vein it says: "Take fast hold of instruction, let her not go; keep her, for she is your life" (Proverbs 4:13).

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND YOU SHALL SEEK NOT AFTER YOUR HEART (15:39)

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Shlach

From the Chassidic Masters

In the history of a people, as in that of an individual life, things don't always go as planned.

The original plan was to go like this: On the 15th of Nissan in the year 2448 from creation (1313 bce), the people of Israel are taken out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses. After seven weeks of preparation and self-refinement, they receive the Torah, their mandate from G-d as His "nation of priests and Holy people," at Mount Sinai. From Sinai it's an eleven-day journey to the Land of Canaan — the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as Israel's eternal homeland. There Moses builds the Holy Temple to serve as the seat of the divine presence in the physical world, and the people of Israel implement the blueprint for life contained in the Torah, establishing the model society which serves as the keystone of a harmonious world community embodying the goodness and perfection of their Creator.

That, however, is not what came to pass. Instead, the journey from Sinai to the Holy Land took not eleven days but forty years. The generation of the Exodus became "the generation of the desert" — only two of the 600,000 adult males who left Egypt lived to enter the Land of Canaan. The grand plan over which Moses was to preside was delayed, and still awaits completion. Moses' disciple, Joshua, began the conquest of the Holy Land, but the task was only completed five centuries later by King David. David's son, Solomon, built the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, but this was not the eternal edifice which Moses would have constructed; it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 3338 (423 bce), rebuilt by Ezra in 3408 (353 bce), and destroyed once more, by the Romans, in 3829 (69 CE). The people of Israel failed to fully live up to their role as a "light unto the nations" and were exiled from their land. The perfect and harmonious world which we were to have achieved by entering the Land of Canaan under Moses' leadership still awaits attainment by Moshiach.

What went wrong? The story is told by our Parshah and is repeated (with the addition of a few important details) in Moses' account in the first chapter of Deuteronomy.

The children of Israel were encamped at Kadesh, on the border of Canaan, in preparation to enter the land, when they approached Moses with a request:

"Let us send men before us, so that they shall search out the land for us and bring us back word as to which road we should take and into which cities we shall come" (Deuteronomy 1:22).

Moses conveyed the people's request to G-d, and G-d replied: "Act according to your own understanding" (Numbers 13:2, as per Rashi on verse). Moses sent twelve spies — one representative from each of the twelve tribes of Israel — to scout the land and report on its terrain and its inhabitants. Forty days later, on the eighth day of Av of the year 2449, the spies returned, bearing samples of the land's huge and luscious fruit and the following assessment:

"We came to the land that you have sent us, and indeed, it flows with milk and honey; this is its fruit.

"However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very great; we also saw giants there. The Amalekites dwell in the Negev, the Hittites, the Jebusites and the Emorites in the hills, and the Canaanites at the sea and on the banks of the Jordan:

"We cannot go up against these people, for they are mightier than we." (Numbers 13:27-31).

Their report caused the nation to lose faith in their ability to conquer the Holy Land, despite G-d's promises. Indeed, the Sages note that the Hebrew word *mimenu*, "than we," also translates as "than he": the spies were, in effect, saying that "they are mightier than He" — that the conquest of the Holy Land is beyond the capacity of the Almighty Himself! All night the nation wept and bemoaned their fate, crying to Moses: "Why is G-d bringing us to this land to fall by the sword, and for our wives and children to fall into captivity?"

Thus it came to pass that on the Ninth of Av — a day which was to bode many tragedies for the people of Israel — G-d informed Moses that the generation that received the Torah at Sinai was not fit to enter the Land of Canaan. He decreed that they shall

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Shlach

From the Chassidic Masters

live out their lives as wanderers in the desert until a new generation can take up the challenge of conquering the land of Canaan and developing it as a “Holy Land” — as the focus of G-d’s presence in the material world.

What Happened?

Virtually all the commentaries pose the question: What happened? Where did they go wrong?

The spies dispatched by Moses were no ordinary individuals: “They were all men of distinction, leaders of the children of Israel” (Numbers 13:3). Furthermore, in all of history, it would be difficult to find a generation whose lives were more saturated with miracles than theirs. Egypt, the most powerful nation on earth at the time, was forced to free them from slavery when “the mighty hand” of G-d inflicted ten supernatural plagues. When Pharaoh’s armies pursued them, the sea split to let them pass and then drowned their pursuers. In the desert, miracles were the stuff of their daily lives: manna from heaven was their daily bread, “Miriam’s well” (a miraculous stone which traveled along with the Israelite camp) provided them with water, and “clouds of glory” sheltered them from the desert heat and cold, kept them clothed and shod, destroyed the snakes and scorpions in their path, and flattened the terrain before them to ease their way.

For these people to doubt G-d’s ability to conquer the “mighty inhabitants” of Canaan seems nothing less than ludicrous. Yet these were the people whose leaders said, “We cannot go up against these people, for they are mightier than we” and even He!

Where did they go wrong?

Desert Idyll

Chassidic master Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi explains that the problem was one of excess spirituality.

The daily miracles experienced by the generation of the Exodus did more than provide them with sustenance and protection — they shielded them from

any and all involvement with the material world. For the first generation of our existence as a people, we lived a wholly spiritual life, free of all material concerns; the very food which nourished us was “bread from heaven.”

Indeed, it could not have been any other way. Our sages have said that, “The Torah could have been given only to the eaters of the manna.” To properly receive and assimilate the divine wisdom, one must be utterly free of the responsibilities and frustrations of physical life — something that is possible only in the kind of environment which our ancestors enjoyed during their sojourn in the Sinai Desert.

This is why, says Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the Spies and their generation were loath to enter the land. Becoming a people with a land would entail plowing, sowing and harvesting; it would mean engaging in commerce and levying taxes; it would require a bureaucracy to run the land and an army to defend it. Their underlying problem with the land was, as the spies expressed it, that “it is a land that consumes its inhabitants” — it consumes one’s time and energy with its corporeal demands and infringes on one’s capacity to study the divine wisdom of Torah and meditate upon its truths. They were unwilling to relinquish their spiritual utopia for the entanglements of an earth-bound life.

Based on this, the Lubavitcher Rebbe explains the Spies’ argument that “We cannot go up against these people, for they are mightier than we,” notwithstanding the tremendous miracles which G-d had performed and was performing for them. We cannot have it both ways, argued the spies. Either we are to be a spiritual people engaged exclusively in spiritual pursuits and sustained by supernatural means; or else we are to enter the natural world of the farmer, merchant and soldier and become subject to its laws. And under these laws — which decree that the numerous, mighty and well-fortified will defeat the few and the weak — there is no way we can defeat the inhabitants of Canaan.

They even went so far as to extend this line of reasoning to the Almighty Himself. If G-d wishes for us to live a spiritual life, then, certainly, He can sustain us with miracles. But if His desire is that we abandon our supra-natural existence to enter the land and assume a natural life, then He Himself has decreed that natural law will govern our fate. In that case, He

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Shlach

From the Chassidic Masters

cannot empower us to *miraculously* conquer the land, since were He to do so, this would defeat the entire purpose of entering the “land.” So “they are mightier than He” — even G-d cannot help us, if He Himself has chosen to transform us into a material people!

Fallen Angels

This also explains the Spies’ mysterious allusion to “the *nefillim*, the descendants of the giants, the fallen ones” whom they encountered in the Holy Land.

Who were the *nefillim*? The Midrash relates that in the years before the Flood, when violence and promiscuity pervaded the earth, two angels, Shamchazi and Azael, pleaded before the Almighty: Allow us to dwell among the humans, and we shall sanctify your name! But no sooner had the two heavenly beings come in contact with the material world, they, too, were corrupted, and played a major role in the disintegration and destruction of their adopted society.

We saw them there, said the returning Spies to the people, the fallen angels who survived the Flood but did not survive the land. If these heavenly beings could not survive the plunge to mundanity, what could be expected of us, mortal and fragile men?

Having It Both Ways

What the spies and their generation failed to understand is that, indeed, men are not angels. Wholly spirit, the angel dissolves on contact with earth. But the human being, hewn of spirit and matter, is a synthesis of the celestial and the animal. Man is empowered to make heaven on earth, to make holy an adjective of land.

This is the essence of the divine objective of creation and the mission entrusted to us at Sinai: to build “a dwelling for G-d in the lowly realms.” To imbue our plowing, sowing and commerce with a holy and G-dly purpose.

In charging us with this mission, the Creator empowered us to indeed “have it both ways”: to create a land that is holy, a nature that is miraculous, a reality that is not bound by its own defining parameters for it serves a purpose greater than itself.

Achieving this aim required a two-phased program: an initial state of unmitigated holiness and spirituality, followed by “entrance into the land” and assumption of its material labors. Because in order to sanctify the land, one requires a vision of the divine truth of truths — which can be attained only by a nation of “manna eaters.” So first there had to be that period of utter isolation from the material world. However, this phase of our national existence was not an end in itself, but the way in which to acquire the tools and resources to miraculize the natural and elevate the everyday.

If the “generation of the desert” would have *themselves* been capable of making the transition into a people of the land, the transformation of the material world into a home for G-d would have been fully and perfectly achieved in that very generation. If they would have believed in their divinely granted capacity to “have it both ways,” their sanctification of the land would have combined their ultimate apprehension of the divine truth with a full involvement with the natural reality.

The generation of the desert failed to actualize the unique opportunity which presented itself at that particular juncture of our history: for there to be a single generation which straddled both worlds, a single generation which first inhabited a world of utter spirituality and then proceeded to apply it to a life on the land. Instead, they fell prey to the tendency of man to “compartmentalize” his life, to label his experiences and attainments as “material,” “spiritual,” “sacred,” “mundane,” “natural” and “supernatural,” thereby delegating and confining them to their respective domains.

So it was left to their children to embark on the longer, more difficult journey, a journey only now reaching its culmination: to bridge the formidable “generation gap” which separates us from our manna-eating ancestors and apply the pristine truth they received in the desert to our own earth-bound lives.

On a Personal Note

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Shlach

From the Chassidic Masters

www.therebbe.org; adapted by
Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com

In addition to the cosmic-historical saga, the very same process and challenge exist, in a miniature scale, in every individual life.

In our own lives, we each have a “generation of the desert” and a “generation which enters the land.” Our childhood and youth are a spiritual and miraculous time: our needs are provided to us “from above” without effort or worry on our part; the business of running the world is blessedly none of our concern. Such a hermitic existence, while contrary to the ultimate purpose of our lives, is the optimal environment for the acquisition of the beliefs, values and knowledge which will guide and inspire our development of the world when we subsequently “enter the land” in our adult years.

The same is true of each particular day of life: we begin our day with a sacrosanct hour of prayer and Torah-study before crossing over into the workday and embarking on the development and sanctification of the material world.

Here, too, exists the danger of succumbing to a “generation gap” between one’s “Sinai Desert” and “Land of Israel,” of adopting the “either/or” mentality of the spies. Therein lies the eternal lesson of the Torah’s account of the incident of the spies: do not allow the wisdom, sensitivity and inspiration of your youth to remain an isolated period in your life. Do not allow your moments of attachment to G-d each morning to remain a “miracle” with no bearing on the natural course of your day. Cross into the land, but do not leave your spiritual “childhood” behind. Remember that the purpose of it all is to make your life and world a “holy land.”

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe