

# SHELACH



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA  
SEDRA SUMMARY



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## 1st aliya (Bamidbar 13:1-20)

Moshe is instructed to send leaders, 1 per tribe, to tour the Land. The leader's names are listed. They are to travel from the Negev to the mountainous area. To see the Land, the people, the cities and the fertility: assess them and bring back produce. While the march to the Land of Israel began fitfully in last week's parsha, in these verses the entry to the Land is imminent. And, really, has begun. The spies will be the first Jews to enter the Land intending to live there since Yaakov did hundreds of years earlier. The sending of the spies, while beginning innocuously enough, will become one of the pillar stories of the Torah; the story of national failure.



## 2nd aliya (13:21-14:7)

So travel they did; entering from the south, traveling north to Hebron, where descendants of the giants lived. They gathered grapes, pomegranates and figs, returning after 40 days, reporting to Moshe, Aharon and the people, showing them the fruits. They said: it is a Land of milk and honey. The people are strong, cities heavily fortified, and we saw giants. Many nations dwell there, including

Amalek. Calev interrupted: Let's go and take this Land, we can do it. The others answered: no, we can't. They slandered the Land, offering that we are grasshoppers in the eyes of the people of the Land. The people challenged Moshe and Aharon: better that we had died in Egypt or here in the desert rather than die trying to take the Land. Moshe and Aharon are despondent, ripping their clothes. Yehoshua said: The Land is very very good. The plan derails. And fast. You asked us to scout the Land: it is lush. The people: giants. The cities: fortified. The fertility: huge fruits. The people are understandably afraid; everything is bigger than us. Including the plan to march in and take this Land; it too is too big for us. While Calev and Yehoshua try to swing the momentum positively Moshe and Aharon act as mourners. G-d has stretched His hand: promised the Land to Avraham, pulled us out of Egypt, reached for us at Sinai, stretched a hand to us in inviting us to the Mishkan, planted Himself in the midst of our camp. And to His outstretched arm – we pull away? Moshe and Aharon are devastated. He is doing this all for you: and you refuse?



## 3rd aliya (14:8-25)

Yehoshua said: if G-d wants, He will bring us there. But do not rebel against Him. The people wanted to stone him. G-d said to Moshe: how long will these people annoy me, after all the miracles I have done? I will wipe them out and make you a great nation. Moshe countered: You can't do that. It will look like You lack the power to bring them into the Land. Gird Yourself, God, and be merciful. G-d said: I forgive them as you have said. But. These people, witnesses to all the miracles who

now balk; they will not enter the Land, save Calev and Yehoshua. This story of the spies is one of the 2 national failures of the Torah, right beside the golden calf. In fact, G-d's response here is almost identical to His response there: let Me wipe them out and make you Moshe the new nation. And Moshe's response here too is identical to there: to do that will mislead the people into thinking that You are unable to follow through and bring the people to the Land. Moshe pleads: G-d relents. This is not the story of failure: it is the story of forgiveness. Just as the story of the golden calf is a story of forgiveness. The more profound the failure, the more loving the forgiveness. Most crucially, this exchange between Moshe and G-d is a glimpse beyond the veil. And that is the powerful meaning of the story. Because we are now embarking on Jewish history, marching to the Land. The beginning of thousands of years of Jewish history. And in preparation for this march, the Torah has outlined in great detail that G-d is in our midst. So, everything should work out just right: guided by His cloud. Yet, Jewish history will be replete with fabulous successes and tragic failures. The trek will be one of peaks and valleys, fits and starts, building and terrible destruction. How are we to understand His ways? With G-d in our midst, should it not be working out better than it is? Oh, that we could peak behind the veil and know His ways. And that is this story. *This story is the peak behind the veil.* G-d wants to destroy us. Moshe pleads. We are saved. This is the story of what could have been but wasn't. Does 40 years in the desert seem harsh? Well, not when juxtaposed to the destruction of the entire people.

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We see 40 years as bad. No, no, no. 40 years is generosity. Forgiveness. Mercy. Love. We must be oh so careful to not conclude that we can surmise the Divine way. This story teaches us: we never know what *could* have been, what *may* have been. It could have been the destruction of our people. But it wasn't; it was only a 40-year delay.



**4th aliya (14:26-15:7)** G-d told Moshe and Aharon to tell the people: As you have said, so

will it be. You will not enter the Land. You all will die in the desert. Your children will enter the Land. The number of days you toured will be the number of years in the desert, 40 years. The people mourned. They attempted to rectify their error by arising early to now journey, but Moshe warned them that G-d is not with them. They suffered defeat. Moshe instructed: when you settle in the Land and bring offerings, bring flour, oil and wine with the offerings. This will be pleasing to G-d. While the people are told that they will all die in the desert, they are also told they will enter the Land. Well, not them, but their children. That is the crucial element of this story: the commitment of G-d to His people is unchanged. His plan was merely delayed. This is the story of love of G-d for His people. While the timetable has been altered, the commitment He has made to bring us to the Land is in full force.



**5th aliya (15:8-16)** A bull offering's flour, oil and wine amounts are higher than for sheep. Everyone brings these similar libations: one law for all. This very short aliya is a continuation of the previous aliya in which the flour, oil and wine amounts are

given for offerings of sheep or rams. The previous aliya did not want to end with the tragedy of the story of the spies. Instead, it ended with the phrase "a pleasing aroma to G-d". In fact, this description of the libations is encouragement. You *will* make it to the Land. And you *will* bring offerings there. You will bring flour, oil and wine that accompany the offerings. Those things are the finest of the produce of the Land. On the heels of the sentence of 40 years in the desert is the promise that you will harvest wheat, olives and grapes in your Land. You may be suffering now due to this terrible sin of the spies. But good times await you. And I, G-d says, want you to approach Me with your full noble station of life: your fine flour, finest olive oil and the joy of wine.



**6th aliya (15:17-26)** Upon entering the Land, the mitzvah of taking challa from bread dough

begins. If an error is made and the entire people accidentally sin as a result, a sin offering of a bull is brought. Atonement is granted as the people sinned accidentally. The post spies encouragement continues. You *will* enter the Land. And you *will* have bread, not manna. In the midst of a crisis, it is hard to imagine the smoke clearing. But it does. And it will. You personally will not make it to the Land; but the Jewish people will. Additionally, this sin that occurred, this national sin has been punished harshly with 40 years in the desert. But national sins will happen and will be forgiven; not by national exile but by a mere offering of a bull. Of course, that requires admitting the sin. When you are contrite, G-d says, I am there to grant forgiveness.



**7th aliya (15:27-41)** A chatat offering atones for an accidental sin. However, the soul is cut

off for one who blasphemes G-d. A person was found chopping wood on Shabbat. He was sequestered, as Moshe and Aharon did not know what to do with him. They were told he was to be put to death. Place tzitzit on the corners of your garment as a reminder to do all the mitzvot and be holy to Me. The encouragement of the post spies failure continues. Not all sins are created equal. Sins are forgiven through a sin offering. Others are much more serious. Blasphemy is a rejection of the very root of all of Jewish existence; that we are marching through life with our G-d. Shabbat violation too; it is a sign of our covenantal relationship, that G-d and the Jewish people have a special relationship. Though Shabbat is mentioned quite a number of times in the Torah, this little story reverberates until our own time. We continue to describe one who is loyal to Torah and Mitzvot as a Shomer Shabbat. As if to say, "Shomer Shabbat? That says it all."

## HAFTORAH YEHOSHUA 2:1 - 24

The Torah portion discusses the twelve spies that were sent by Moshe to explore the Holy Land. We fast forward in our haftorah to the story of the spies that Yehoshua sent to scout the city of Yericho, prior to the Jewish people's invasion of the Land.

The two spies arrive in Yericho and lodged at an inn operated by a woman named Rachav. When their presence is made known, she hides her guests and protects

them from the king. She actually hid them on her rooftop.

The two spies assure her that they will protect her and her family when the Israelites enter and conquer the Land. She is to place a scarlet thread in the window as a sign that her home is a place of safe haven.

The haftorah then dramatically describes Rachav providing a way for the men to safely escape. The men are able to grab onto a rope and lower themselves from her window. The spies are successful in exiting the city and return to Yehoshua with their report. ■

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