



## ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS  
RCA ISRAEL REGION

### PARSHAT SHELACH



#### 1ST ALIYA (BAMIDBAR 13:1-20)

Moshe is instructed to send leaders, 1 per tribe, to tour the Land. Their 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.

Rashi says that Moshe was given the discretion to send spies. He was not ordered to do so. It was his choice. Given the bad outcome, in retrospect it seems like a bad error in judgement. Why then did he send them? What was he thinking?

Sending the spies is the first tangible step in the march to the Land. Entering the Land is going to be messy business. It means conquering through war. Some will want to do that. Some will not.

And knowing he is facing this contentious issue Moshe must have been spooked by the multiple conflicts at the end of last week's Parsha. The people are a cantankerous lot. Complaining. Dissatisfied. Moshe must have been a bit skittish after all those complaints. If they complain about meat and about my leadership, who knows what kind of rebellion could come from the challenges of entering the Land. The opinions for and against will be fierce; we could have a civil war.

Moshe must have wondered: how can I get the people on board and avoid conflict? What strategy could avoid civil war?

I know. Enlist the support of the 12 leaders

of the tribes. If the leaders are on board, the people will feel more willing to shoulder the challenges of entering the Land. Sounds like a good idea.



#### 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, Calev and Yehoshua rip their clothes. Yehoshua said: the Land is very, very good.

The spy's mission backfires. Instead of getting buy-in from the leaders, the leaders are scared. They are worried, unconvinced that the war will be successful. The leaders are scared and the people not far behind.

There are many themes running through this story. We could look at the story and try to analyze the motives of the people, what they were thinking, why they lacked faith; all important themes.

But we can also look at the story as a

paradigm. What is the story teaching us about the dynamic of Jewish history? Or of the interaction of leaders and followers. Or of the interplay of G-d and man in the entry to the Land.

One paradigm we could extract is in Moshe's decision making. And in this there is a powerful and enduring lesson. Moshe made a terrible error in judgement in sending the spies. But that is in hindsight. In real time, following a series of little rebellions from the people, he was faced with a quandary as to how to prevent a big rebellion, a civil war. Moshe felt embattled. The people complained 3 times in last week's parsha; one complaint wasn't even spelled out, then followed by dissatisfaction with the manna and wanting meat, and that followed by his very own brother and sister criticizing him.

If lack of meat makes them question Moshe's leadership, how much more so the upcoming war. Moshe desperately sought a remedy for what he saw was an impending rebellion. His decision seemed wise at the time, designed to prevent this civil war; sending spies. And it turned tragic.

The lesson to us could well be, and I say this in our current national turmoil, not meaning to take any sides: decisions that leaders have to make are, well, they are tough to get right. Moshe did what he thought was best and it turned out bad – and that is Moshe, the greatest leader we ever had. If he erred, we can be sure that leaders over the years, lesser people than Moshe, will inevitably use their best judgement and sometimes just get it wrong. It doesn't mean they are bad people. Just that they are wrong.

If Moshe can err in judgement, and we know his good intentions, then any leader can err, and will err, regardless of their good

intentions.



### 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 appear as if 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.

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. If you wipe them out, people will assume You are good at taking the people out of Egypt. But You can't bring the people to the Land. Your power is limited.

Moshe pleads: G-d relents. And that is a powerful lesson, the same lesson as the Golden Calf. They are both stories of failure, to be sure. But more crucially, they are both stories of forgiveness. G-d wanted to destroy the Jewish people. But He didn't. He didn't at the golden calf. And He doesn't here.

Of course, we only know of that near destruction of the people and Moshe's pleading to save them because we were given a glimpse beyond the veil, privy to the exchange between G-d and Moshe. The people on the street never know this. All they know is that they are punished with 40 years in the desert, never to see the Land.

And that is the power of this story. *This*

story **is** the peek behind the veil. G-d wants to destroy us. Moshe pleads. We are saved.

It 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 alternative: destruction of the entire people. We see 40 years as bad. No, no, no. 40 years is generosity. Forgiveness. Mercy. Love.

We are at such a disadvantage when viewing the tragedies of Jewish history. Because we only see what actually happens; we never see what *could* have happened. What we see may look terrible. But what *could* have been might be so much worse.

We must be oh so careful when thinking 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.

The 40 years in the desert looks like a tragedy. But it is actually Divine love; He did not destroy us. Only delayed us.



#### 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 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 challah 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 spy 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.



### 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 lessons of leadership continue. Moshe and Aharon do not know what to do with the person found chopping wood on Shabbat. And they have no problem admitting that they don't know.

A leader as great as Moshe does not have all the answers all the time. No shame in admitting that.

## 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. ■



## STATS

37<sup>th</sup> of the 54 sedras; 4<sup>th</sup> of 10 in Bamidbar. Written on 198 lines, ranks 25<sup>th</sup>. 10 Parshiyot; 7 open, 3 closed. 119 pesukim, ranks 21, 6<sup>th</sup>/Bamidbar. 1540 words, ranks 27, 5<sup>th</sup>/Bamidbar. 5820 letters, ranks 27, 4<sup>th</sup>/Bamidbar. Shelach has shorter than average pesukim, which explains the drop in rank for words and letters, yet the rise in rank within Bamidbar indicates that there are sedras with even shorter pesukim.



## MITZVOT

3 mitzvot - 2 positives - Challah & Tzitzit, and 1 prohibition, not to follow the temptations of your heart and eyes. As we point out often, the distribution of mitzvot in the Torah is very uneven. With only 3 mitzvot, there are 25 sedras with fewer mitzvot than Shelach and 26 with more. 3 is the median number of mitzvot per sedra in the Torah. T'ruma and Chukat also have 3 mitzvot each.



Mazal Tov to



**Binyamin & Nancy Chernofsky  
and family on the birth of  
their great-granddaughter**