



Parsha Snapshot

Shlach

G-d instructs Moses to send spies to Canaan, to scout out the territory the Jews will soon conquer. According to the Midrash, sending spies was the Jews' idea, not G-d's; the request emanated from a subtle, subconscious lack of faith. G-d acquiesced to their request, but the experiment was to have disastrous results.

Moses selects twelve distinguished leaders, one from each tribe. The group travels to Canaan and spends forty days touring the length and breadth of the land. They return with incredible-sized fruits, which they show the people, reporting, "We came to the land to which you sent us, and it is indeed flowing with milk and honey, and these are its fruits. However, mighty is the nation dwelling in the land; the cities are fortified and very great; and we also saw giant's children there."

Only two of the spies— Caleb, representing the tribe of Judah, and Joshua, of the tribe of Ephraim, voice their dissent: "The land which we passed through to scout is very, very good. If G-d wants [to help] us, He shall bring us into this land and give it to us – a land flowing with milk and honey. Only don't rebel against G-d; and do not fear the people of the land..."

Sadly, the people do not believe them. "The entire congregation lifted their voices, and the nation wept that night." The people's lack of faith is a grievous sin; Israel is threatened with annihilation. Moses steps in to pray for forgiveness. G-d accepts his plea, but swears that the entire generation – "all the men who saw My glory, and My miracles which I performed in Egypt and in the desert – yet challenged me these ten times, and did not listen to My voice – shall not see the land." Only Caleb and Joshua will enter Canaan; the rest will perish in the desert, where they are to wander for forty years. Their children will be the ones who will, at long last, enjoy the promised inheritance.

The next morning, a group of Jews, committed to rectifying their error, begins marching towards the Land. Moses warns them that they are too late; their misplaced zeal will not earn them Divine assistance. The people persist in their attempt, and are roundly defeated by the indigenous people of the land.

G-d now communicates to Moses further laws of the Temple service. These instructions – applicable only in the Land of Israel – serve as a message of consolation to the Jews, a reassurance that they will indeed enter the Land one day.

The Parsha concludes with the *mitzvah* of "*tzitzis*" – fringes affixed to the corners of every four-cornered garment. Four strings are threaded through a hole in each corner and knotted, leaving eight dangling ends. Some of these strings must be colored with *techeiles* – a blue dye obtained from the aquatic *chilazon*, whose identity has been lost over time. *Tzitzis* serve as an ever-present reminder of G-d's *mitzvos*, and help guard the wearer against temptation. *Tzitzis* also symbolize the Exodus; for this reason, these verses were incorporated as the third paragraph of the Daily Shema, fulfilling the command to remember the Exodus every day of our lives.



L.I.T.N.
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