



## The Greater Washington Community Kollel Torah Minute *In memory of Rabbi Kalman Winter zt"l*

Parasha Shelach 5773

In Parashas Shelach, we learn about the tragic episode of the spies. On the cusp of entering the Land of Eretz Yisroel, the nation of Israel dispatched twelve spies, great men and leaders, each one representing a tribe, to reconnoiter the Land and report back to the people. Upon their return 40 days later, they shared with the people a demoralizing report of the great might of the people of Canaan, its impregnable cities, and that the land "is a Land that devours its inhabitants." The Jewish people, instead of trusting in G-d, his power and goodness, accepted the slanderous report of the spies. They rebelled and demanded a new leader who would lead them back to Egypt. As a consequence for their rebellion and lack of trust in G-d, instead of entering the Land of Israel, the generation was decreed to wander the desert for 40 years until they would all die. Only their children would enter the Land. The spies themselves, for issuing this libelous report, were condemned to die immediately from a plague.

When we observe the report of the spies and their contention that the land "is a Land that devours its inhabitants," we wonder how such great leaders could say such a thing? A land that G-d calls "a Land flowing with milk and honey" they should characterize as a miasma?

Rashi, based on the Talmud in Sotah, tells us that the spies encountered a great and unnatural number of funerals in Canaan. Everywhere they went, they observed people burying their dead and engaged in mourning. The Gemara tells us that G-d caused this miraculous spate of death in order to distract the local inhabitants so that the spies could carry on their surveillance undetected. The question becomes, however, why were the spies punished? Was it not a reasonable conclusion to reach based on what they had seen? Wasn't their contention that the land induced death a sensible assumption of what they had witnessed?

In truth, however, their conclusions were not legitimate nor reasonable. The spies had been part of the great Exodus from Egypt, the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the wonders of the manna, and the myriad miraculous ways that G-d provided for them in the desert. They had seen demonstrably the great love that G-d had for his people. They witnessed G-d's fatherly concern for their welfare and willingness to alter nature for their benefit and comfort. In light of this history, their conclusion that the many deaths that they had seen, were a consequence of the land that G-d had lovingly promised them, was indeed neither legitimate nor reasonable. ***The bonds of loves that had been formed, the G-dly experiences that they had, should have been due cause for them to contemplate what they saw, and come to a proper conclusion - that G-d was sheltering and protecting them, and that the death that abounded in the Land was indeed for their benefit.***

This powerful lesson, that we must see what transpires, not in a vacuum but in a context of a long and loving relationship filled with care and devotion is relevant, not only concerning our relationship with G-d, but with all we love and cherish. How often would this perspective be valuable and appropriate in our everyday dealings with our parents, spouses, and so many others.

***Have a great Shabbos,  
Rabbi Menachem Winter***