


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 8 June 2007 - 22 Sivan 5767
Sedra Shelach

THE TOO-SPIRITUAL SPIES

THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN THE DESERT TOGETHER WITH MOSES were living in a very spiritual and ethereal way. All their needs were miraculously catered for, by Manna from Heaven and water from the rock¹. At the centre of their camp was the Sanctuary, imparting a sense of holiness to all.

The Sedra² tells us about the Spies. They were sent to investigate the situation in the Promised Land. When they returned, they gave a false and dismal report that it could never be conquered. “They are too strong for us... it is a land which devours its inhabitants”. The entire nation fell into despair. Instead of trying to enter the Holy Land, they said, “if only we would die in the desert”.

As a punishment for this rebellion G-d said that the adults in that generation would never enter the Holy Land. They would wander in the desert for forty years and only their children would enter the Land of Israel.

Chassidic teachings point out that there is something very puzzling about the whole story. The twelve men who were chosen to be Spies were all leading figures among the Jewish people. Further, they had witnessed the most remarkable miracles: the Ten Plagues,



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the Splitting of the Sea. Why did they think that G-d would not be able to help them conquer the Land of Israel? How could they have made such a great mistake?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that indeed the Spies were very scholarly and spiritual people. They deeply loved the sacred atmosphere of the community in the desert. In these surroundings, fed by the Manna and the miraculous water from the well, they could study and contemplate.

The Spies were frightened to leave the wilderness. Entry to the Land of Israel would mean ploughing and reaping, being involved with practical reality with all its problems. The Spies did not feel that true spirituality could be combined with daily life. They believed that, by definition, the two were incompatible.

For this reason they said “it is a land which devours its inhabitants”. If we leave our unique home in the desert, we will become totally involved in material concerns, we will necessarily forget everything spiritual and holy. They *preferred* to remain in the desert.

In the eyes of G-d, this was the wrong approach. The goal of the Jew is to live *in the world*. Spiritual qualities and power are not given to him or her in order to dwell in an isolated island of holiness, but rather to be in the world and to elevate it.

The remarkable task of the Jew is to make practical daily life, in all its detail, into a dwelling for the Divine. Since the generation of the Spies could not face this challenge, they remained in the desert. It was their children who entered the Promised Land.

Similarly, our task is to live in the real physical world, utilising all the input of the spirituality and holiness of Jewish teaching, but ultimately with the goal to make *this world* into a dwelling for the Divine. Hence so many of Jewish laws concern practical life. By keeping these laws in our lives in the real world we are personally “entering the Land” and fulfilling the purpose of Creation³.

1. The ‘Well of Miriam’ miraculously provided water for the Jewish people during their years of wandering through the desert. See Exodus 17:1-7. 2. Numbers chs.13-15. 3. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 4 pp.1041-1047.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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SEDRA SHELACH

THE WAY FORWARD

"That is a really good idea" Daniela said. "That would look really nice; we could have lots of small tents made out of small pieces of material".

"And we could make small flags for each of the twelve tribes." said Michelle. "And then make a nice model of the Sanctuary in the middle".

The class had been divided into groups and given different projects. Each group had to take a concept they had learned in the Sedra class and create an art project expressing that idea.

Daniela, Michelle and Rebecca had been given the job of building a model Jewish camp in the desert.

"But" Rebecca said "how will we be able to get the right kind of material for such a job, how will we be able to paint the flags so small and not smear the colours?" She was very worried that they would put in a huge amount of energy and the whole thing would flop.

"Don't worry," said Daniela. "It will look very good. I think I can see some material on up there on the second shelf.

Trust me, it will be okay.”

“Let’s try and get a different project from the teacher,” said Rebecca. “this one is too complicated”.

“It’s not too complicated,” said Daniela. “You’ll see, it will come out just right”.

“I don’t think so,” Rebecca said. “I am worried that we won’t be able to put it all together properly, and it will be a terrible flop. Let’s ask for something easier.”

The teacher had been listening and decided to intervene. “Rebecca has a point and I understand that you are worried. However, the answer to your worries is in this week’s Sedra”.

“Doesn’t this week’s Sedra speak about the spies?” Daniela said, wondering how that related to Rebecca’s anxiety.

“Well” The teacher said “when Hashem sent the Spies to spy out the land and see how best they could enter, they made the mistake of thinking that Hashem was asking them whether or not they thought it would be possible to conquer the Land of Israel.”

“I remember” Rebecca said. “They started saying how they thought it was impossible to go into the Land of Israel because the people are all giants, and the land devours the people.”

“Yes” said Michelle. “They had the job of finding the best way to go into the Land, not to decide whether or not they should do so.”

“So what you mean,” said Rebecca slowly, “is that sometimes we have a job to do, and we need to ask ourselves how best to do it, rather than *if* we can do it.”

“Yes!” said Daniela. “So with no more worrying, let’s get on with it. With the help of Hashem, it’s going to be great!”

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