

**Shlach Lekha - Selected Shorts**  
**Rabbi Eliot Malomet June 5, 2021 - 25 Sivan 5781**

במדבר י"ג:ב'

(ב) שְׁלַח־לְךָ אַנְשִׁים וַיְהִרֻוּ אֶת־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ אֶחָד אִישׁ אֶחָד לְמִטָּה אַבְתִּירוּ תִשְׁלְחוּ כָּל נָשִׂיא כְּהֵם:

**Numbers 13:2**

(2) "Send for yourself men, that they may scout out the land of Canaan, that I am giving to the Children of Israel; One man, one man per tribe of their fathers, you are to send, each one a leader among them." There's a lot of masculinity in this verse. It is tempting to another word here: אחים – *brothers*, as in the exchange between Abraham and Lot (Gen. 13:8) when they fought over their pasture: *Let there be no strife between you and me because כִּי־אֲנָשִׁים אַחִים אָנְחֵנו we are brother-men!* Here the spies are אֲנָשִׁים but not אחים -*brother-men*. In the Joseph stories, the brothers are referred to frequently as אֲנָשִׁים. Premonitions of conflict shadow this story from the outset. These men are tribal leaders, which, like governors of states or premiers of provinces, already pits them against one another. And they are the inverse of Joseph's brothers. Recall that when the brothers go from Canaan to Egypt, Joseph accuses them of being spies. Here these men – who are really spies – go from the desert to Canaan. They are definitely not a 'band of brothers.' However, it's hard not to see how the fraternal conflicts of prior generations left an indelible mark on subsequent generations.

במדבר י"ג:ד'

(ד) וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹתָם לְמִטָּה רְאוּבֵן שְׁמוּעַ בֶּן־זִכְרִי:

**Numbers 13:4**

(4) *And these were their names: From the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zaccur.* A favorite theme: The book of Numbers is a book of Names (Shmot). But the fact that each of these men is named gives an added dimension of humanity and drama to the story. The rabbis find in their names hints to their characters. These verses are an invitation to midrash makers, interpreters, sketch-writers and selected-shorts commentators.

במדבר י"ג:כ'

(כ) וְיָמָּה הָאָרֶץ הַשְּׂמֹנֶה הִוא אִם־רְזָה תִּגְשָׁבָה עַל אִם־אֵין וְהַתְּסֻקָּתָם וְלִקְחֹתָם מִפְּרֵי הָאָרֶץ וְהַיְמִים יָמֵי בְּכוּרֵי עֲנָבִים:

**Numbers 13:20**

(20) *Is the soil rich or poor? Is it wooded or not? And take pains to bring back some of the fruit of the land.*—Now it happened to be the season of the first ripe grapes. Notice that the mission of the spies is to gather specific types of information about the land, not to render judgements or opinions. The word וְהִתְחַזְקֶתֶם – lit. *strengthen yourselves* or *exert yourselves* is curious; it's hard not to hear a subtle condescension here – strengthen yourselves because you are not so strong; you are men, but do you comport yourselves as men? (Or as country singer Sheryl Crow sings, "are you strong enough to be my man?") Interesting that the text points out that it's *the season of first ripe grapes*. Obviously if they spied in a different season they wouldn't be able to bring back any fruit. (We in the northeast United States are now in the 'flowering' season for orchards and produce). This highlight connects us to the scene later in the story where they take a huge cluster of grapes and bring it back. This is an 'anticipatory set' for the story.

במדבר י"ג:כ"ו

(כ"ו) וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֵל־אַהֲרֹן וְאֵל־כָּל־עֵדֶת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־מִדְבַּר פָּאָרָן קִדְשָׁה וַיִּשְׁבִּיבוּ אֹתָם דְּבַר וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵדָה וַיַּרְאוּם אֶת־פְּרֵי הָאָרֶץ:

**Numbers 13:26**

(26) *They went straight to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran, and they made their report to them and to the whole community, as they showed them the fruit of the land.* Grapes, pomegranates, and figs as specified in v. 23. These are the luxury fruits of the land. This little detail reveals a little teasing cruelty on the part of the spies: here's the kind of produce you can get there (are you enjoying your manna?); but, don't get too excited, it's a dangerous place.

במדבר י"ג:כ"ט

(כ"ט) עָמְלַק יוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב וְהַחִתִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי וְהָאֱמֹרִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּהָר וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי יוֹשֵׁב עַל־הַיַּם וְעַל יַד הַיַּרְדֵּן:

**Numbers 13:29**

(29) *Amalekites dwell in the Negeb region; Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites inhabit the hill country; and Canaanites dwell by the Sea and along the Jordan.* Nothing like triggering trauma by invoking traumatic memory. 'Amalek'

is not only the name of Israel's ruthless arch-enemy but a codeword for danger. Listing the names of the other nations in this way emphasizes the danger ahead. We are only one people, and they are five peoples. They will be the allied powers against us and we don't stand a chance.

במדבר י"ד:ב'

(ב) וַיִּלְנוּ עַל־מִשְׁחָה וְעַל־אֶהְרֹן כֹּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם כָּל־הָעֵדָה לֹד־מִתְנוּ בְּאַרְצָן מִצְרַיִם אֹו בַּמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לֹד־מִתְנוּ:

#### Numbers 14:2

(2) *All the Israelites railed against Moses and Aaron. "If only we had died in the land of Egypt," the whole community shouted at them, "or if only we might die in this wilderness!"* One doesn't blame them for their dread here, but this had to sting, after all, Egypt was no fun either. On a deeper level they are denying their past (Egypt), they are negating their present (the desert) and they are expressing antipathy towards their non-existent future (the land). We also note they are expressing an idea that is the exact opposite of entire biblical ethos: instead of choosing life, they are choosing death.

במדבר י"ד:י'

(י) וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל־הָעֵדָה לְרִגְוֹם אֹתָם בְּאַבְנִים וּכְבוֹד ה' נִרְאָה בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֶל־כָּל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: {פ}

#### Numbers 14:10

(10) *As the whole community threatened to pelt them with stones, the Presence of the LORD appeared in the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites.* This is not a great moment for Joshua and Caleb. Having tried to calm the people down and reassure them, the people are ready to kill them. The violent impulse lingers just beneath the surface of the mob. Responsible leaders understand that it doesn't take much to unleash the ugliness; the spies lit the fuse to a great explosion. Without God's appearance things would have gone terribly awry.

במדבר י"ד:ט-כ'

(ט) סָלַח־נָא לַעֲזֹן הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּגְדַל חֲסִדְךָ וְכֹאשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתָּה לַעֲמֵם הַזֶּה מִמִּצְרַיִם וְעַד־הַנְּהָה: (כ) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' סָלַחְתִּי כַּדְבָרְךָ:

#### Numbers 14:19-20

(19) *Pray, grant-pardon for the iniquity of this people as Your loyalty is great, just as you have been bearing (iniquity) for this people from Egypt until now!* (20) *And the LORD said, "I pardon, according to your words.* Moses appeals to God's loyalty/love but God forgives the people because Moses asked. We know that God loves the people but at this moment, God forgives not because of

His love for Israel but because of his acquiescence to Moses.

במדבר י"ד:ל"ד

(לד) בְּמִסְפַּר הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר־תִּרְתַּם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם יוֹם לַשָּׁנָה יוֹם לַשָּׁנָה תִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־עוֹנֹתֵיכֶם אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וַיִּדְעֻתֶם אֶת־תְּנוּאַתִּי:

#### Numbers 14:34

(34) *According to the number of days that you scouted out the land, forty days, (for each) day a year, (for each) day a year, you are to bear your iniquities forty years, thus you will come to know my hostility.* A crushing sentence. 40 symbolizes transformation. There are lots of 40 day periods in the Torah: several in the Noah story, several when Moses is on Mount Sinai. 40 days is a transformative period. How much moreso, 40 years! It's a lifetime! The message would have been clear to them: this is a life sentence. This makes their previous complaint (14:2) seem prophetic if not ironic.

במדבר ט"ו:ל"ו

(לו) וַיֵּצִיאוּ אֹתוֹ מִבְּרֵית־הָעֵדָה אֶל־מַחֲוֵץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּרְגְּמוּ אֹתוֹ בְּאַבְנִים וַיָּמָת כְּאִשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת־מֹשֶׁה: {פ}

#### Numbers 15:36

(36) *So the whole community took him outside the camp and stoned him to death—as the LORD had commanded Moses.* In reference to the wood-gatherer. A complicated story, a violation of the fifth commandment, hence the capital punishment. But they don't lay hands on him.

במדבר ט"ו:ל"ח

(לח) דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצֵת עַל־כַּנְּפֵי בְגָדֵיהֶם לְדֹרֹתָם וְנִתְּנָה עַל־צִיצֵת הַכַּנָּף פְּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת:

#### Numbers 15:38

(38) *Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the ages; let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner.* Tzitzit call to mind the 'tzitz' – frontlet of the Kohen Gadol which was suspended by a cord of blue. The KG's mission was to be holy to God in the holiest of zones; the people's mission is to be holy to God in the most expansive of zones, namely the world; Israel and the KG have complimentary missions with complimentary garb. The rituals listed here convey order and are a counterweight to the political story of the spies which conveys disorder. Ritual structures time and space. Politics structures society. Rituals at their best, create peace; politics, at the very least, ought to create stability. Shabbat Shalom!