

PARSHAT SHELACH

19 - 25 Sivan 5785
15 - 21 June 2025

Torah: Numbers 13:1-15:41
HafTorah: Joshua 2:1-24

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

Negative Mitzvah 248

Denying a Debt

It is forbidden for a person to deny a debt that he owes or to deny that a person entrusted him an object for safekeeping.

Negative Mitzvah 249

Swearing Falsely in Denial of a Debt

It is forbidden to take a false oath in denial of a debt or any other financial obligation.

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ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

UPON A TIMELESS TEL

Twenty-five miles south of Jerusalem, an impressive tel rises above the plains of Judea. A city built upon hundreds of previously destroyed cities, Tel Lachish marks the terrain between Jerusalem and Hebron, whispering ancient legends of its proud inhabitants across the sweeping foothills.

Common to the Middle Eastern landscape, a tel is literally a "mound," formed by layers of occupation over thousands of years. As each society builds its city upon the ruins of a previous period, the site rises, permanently altering the topography of the land.

The town of Lachish bears great historical significance, resting on ancient metropolises where valiant men and women from the times of Joshua through the Maccabean era once resided. Marked with a tumultuous history of battle and conquest, Tel Lachish carries their love and their pain, their joys and their sorrows, their victories and their defeats.

The tourists come to see Lachish not just because it imposingly juts out of the Judean lowland, but because they want to hear the story of this unusual tel; they want to breathe the air of a city that has experienced endless destruction and rebuilding, but never lost anything along the way.

G-d could have made us perfect architects. If He wanted, He could have endowed us with tools to build exclusively palatial structures that last for eternity. Instead, He foresaw the beauty of a tel. It was with this vision, in the early summer of 2449 (1312 BCE), that G-d quietly entered a unique potential for human failure into our universe.

They were a newborn nation, standing on the threshold of entering the Promised Land. Hesitant about their future, the Jewish people ask Moses for permission to survey the unknown territory soon to be their home. And so, Moses, the humble servant of G-d, turns to his Master for consent. But astonishingly - for the first time in history - G-d tells Moses to do as he pleases.

We all know how the story ends. The spies return with negative reports; the Jews become fearful; and tragically, the generation of the great Exodus never enters the Land of Israel.

It's a classic question of Torah commentators: If G-d said, "Do what you want," didn't Moses sense that He didn't really approve of the Jews'

request? Why did Moses persist in sending them?

Indeed, Moses was well aware of the risks involved in dispatching spies; yes, he sensed the possibility for catastrophe in G-d's noncommittal answer. But he was also conscious of the fact that G-d was giving humankind an opportunity for growth that can come about only through failure.

"Do as you wish," G-d said, effectively opening a new and empowering dimension in man's choice.

I'll leave you room to err, says G-d, because I know you won't leave your shattered city in ruins; I know that when you fall, you will rebuild - grander, stronger and more beautiful edifices than ever before. I know that when you stray, what you really want is to be nearer to Me. I know you're going to build a tel. So I'll let you make mistakes.

And we do.

I reckon G-d made us better-than-perfect architects. In fact, He imbued us with such a genuine and passionate desire to create, with such a thirst for growth, that sometimes we find ourselves razing down the old only to give way to the new that is aching to emerge.

We crave rebirth. Status quo never feels right; the old is simply never sufficient. We have an instinctive urge to build anew. Is that why we keep falling?

When we let ourselves knock down the walls of our personal city, on the surface, it looks like everything we've worked towards is suddenly gone. But don't let the vacuum of ground zero dishearten you, because that subsoil can't be bought anywhere in the universe. Indeed, like the tel, when we reconstruct our own little broken worlds, it is on terra firma that carries all the resilience and fortitude of our previous journeys.

Sometimes, we build our tel painfully, slowly, trudging through the remains with a broken sort of hope - can we possibly restore our city this time? At other times, we labor with a fury, catapulting through the wreckage with a surety, with a swiftness, so that we don't set our eyes on what has crumbled, lest we break from regret. We throw ourselves into the building, we lay brick upon brick, glancing away from the debris, and looking upwards only at what we've already constructed in our mind's eye.

But regardless of how we build, we never leave the city in ruins - after all, it's a tel. And with every breakdown comes an even greater restoration, the earth, begging to be tilled again.

When you stand on the pinnacle of Tel Lachish, you can see for miles. It's a breathtaking panorama, extending from Bet Guvrin in the north all the way to the Hebron hills in the east. They say you can't get that view from anywhere else in the area.

What a gift G-d gave when he granted us the ability to fall. For now, you can stand at the top of your tel and see the world like you've never seen it before. Life suddenly has new meaning, new depth. Indeed, from the summit you can see what always surrounded you, but this time, oh so differently.

On the 15th day of Av, 2487 (1274 BCE), the Jews of Moses' generation stopped dying in the desert - a tragedy that had been a consequence of the spies' failed mission. This day marked the end of their temporary decline, and more importantly, the beginning of subsequent rebuilding and growth, as their children prepared to enter the Land of Israel. And though our holy cities - both in spirit and of stone - endured relentless destruction in the centuries that followed, the monumental tels in our homeland and our souls continue to rise above the landscape, a tribute to our battered but unbeaten faith and our intrinsic longing to heighten the bond with our Creator.

As we plow the wounded earth yet again, let us look towards the ultimate rebuilding of all time, recalling the promising words of the prophet Jeremiah: Venivneta ha'ir al tilah - "And the city shall be rebuilt on its former tel."

By Sara Hecht

MISSION POSSIBLE

A story: Rabbi Hirsh Altein suffered tremendous back pains, and after unsuccessfully trying many medications and treatments all the specialists he visited advised him that surgery was the only way to rid himself of the problem. When the Lubavitcher Rebbe was asked for advice, he implied that surgery was unnecessary; there must be a cream on the market which could solve the problem! But the doctors continued to insist that they know of no alternative to surgery.

As a last resort, Rabbi Altein visited Dr. Avrohom Seligson (the Rebbe's personal doctor, and a devoted Chassid). Dr. Seligson, who was not a back specialist, checked Rabbi Altein and prescribed an ointment for his back. Sure enough, until his passing more than twenty years

later, Rabbi Altein never had a recurrence of his back pains.

When Dr. Seligson was asked how he knew to prescribe the particular cream, when all the specialists thought that surgery was the only option, he responded: "The results of the check-up indicated that he needed surgery - but the Rebbe said that this wasn't the case. I realized that the Rebbe merely wanted a 'vessel' through which a miracle could be manifest, so I prescribed the simplest and cheapest cream available on the market!"

The spies' reconnaissance mission to Canaan was intended to gather intelligence information about the enemy. They were told to scout the lay of the land, as well as its natural and man-made fortifications. They were to report on the enemy's strengths and weaknesses, and the natural resources they could rely on during times of battle. This information would be used by the Israelite military brass to formulate an appropriate combat strategy for the impending battle to conquer the Holy Land.

The spies - all of whom were upright and pious people with unquestionable integrity - faithfully went about their task, but what they saw made their stomachs churn: the Canaanites were a powerful nation, gargantuan people with awesome strength. No fewer than 31 kings had royal palaces defended by military contingents on the Canaan mainland. There was no way, the spies concluded, for the

Israelites to achieve a natural victory against the formidable Canaanite foe. "We are unable to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we," they declared! Yet this honest conclusion had disastrous results. G-d was highly displeased with their report and the reaction it engendered, and it caused the premature demise of the entire generation which left Egypt.

Where did the spies go wrong? Can you tell someone to bring back a report and then punish him because the report isn't to your liking? Isn't that an example of shooting the messenger because you don't care for the message?

The Rebbe explains that the spies erred in assuming that they had to reach a conclusion. They were told to go to Canaan and bring back dry facts: the nature of the land and its population etc. They were not asked to render a decision regarding the feasibility of conquering the land. G-d had promised the Jews a military victory against the Canaanites, and therefore that was not a debatable issue. The question wasn't if it could be done, but rather how it would be done.

The same is true with our personal lives. We all are "sent on a mission" to this world, to illuminate our surroundings with the radiance of Torah and mitzvot. Often the opposition seems to be too formidable; the obstacles to implementing G-d's appear to be insurmountable. When these thoughts enter our minds, we must remember that if G-d charged us

with the mission it certainly can be carried out. Our job is only to figure out how to do it.

*By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg
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SHELACH IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Shelach," means "Send" and it is found in Numbers 13:2.

Moses sends twelve spies to the land of Canaan. Forty days later they return, carrying a huge cluster of grapes, a pomegranate, and a fig, to report on a lush and bountiful land. But ten of the spies warn that the inhabitants of the land are giants and warriors "more powerful than we"; only Caleb and Joshua insist that the land can be conquered, as G-d has commanded.

The people weep that they'd rather return to Egypt. G-d decrees that Israel's entry into the land shall be delayed forty years, during which time that entire generation will die out in the desert. A group of remorseful Jews storm the mountain on the border of the land and are routed by the Amalekites and Canaanites.

The laws of the Nesachim (meal, wine and oil offerings) are given, as well as the Mitzvah to consecrate a portion of the dough (Challah) to G-d when making bread. A man violates the Shabbat by gathering sticks and is put to death. G-d instructs to place fringes (Tzitzit) on the four corners of our garments, so that we should remember to fulfill the Mitzvot (divine commandments).

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 19 Sivan 5785 - 15 June 2025

Passing of Rabbi Yehuda Ibn Attar (1733)

Rabbi Yehuda ibn Attar born in 5415 (1655), served as the rabbi of Fez, Morocco, and is regarded as one of the greatest leaders of Moroccan Jewry. A saintly and pious man, he was known as a miracle worker and was revered by the local Jews and Muslims alike. He refused to accept a salary from the community, working as a goldsmith instead. He passed away on 19 Sivan 5493 (1733).

Monday, 20 Sivan 5785 - 16 June 2025

Martyrs of Blois (1171)

The 20th of Sivan is the anniversary of the first blood libel in France. On this date in 4931 (1171), tens of Jewish men and women were burned alive in the French town of Blois on the infamous accusation that Jews used the blood of Christian children in the preparation of Matzot for Passover. Rabbeinu Tam, one of the great Tosafists, declared the day a day of fasting.

Cossack Massacre in Nemerov (1648)

5408 and 5409 (1648-1649) saw the Cossack rampages through, and massacres of, Jewish communities across Poland, in which tens of thousands of Jews were brutally murdered. On 20 Sivan 5408 (1648), the Cossacks, with the help of the local Ukrainians, broke into the castle where the local Jews had taken shelter. Many thousands of Jews were massacred, in one of the largest single attacks of what would come to be called "Gezeras Tach V'Tat" ("the decree of '08 and '09"). The Council of the Four Lands, the central Rabbinic authority in the region, proclaimed the

day a fast day in commemoration of the Jews killed in the Cossack massacres, reinstating the fast day designated by Rabbeinu Tam centuries earlier. The fast day is no longer widely observed.

Thursday, 23 Sivan 5785 - 19 June 2025

Haman's Decree Counteracted (357 BCE)

Even after Haman was hanged on the 17th of Nissan 3404 (357 BCE), his evil decree "to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, from young to old, infants and women, in one day, the 13th day of the 12th month (Adar)" remained in force. Queen Esther pleaded with King Achashverosh to annul the decree, but Achashverosh insisted that "a writ that has been written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's seal, cannot be returned." Instead, he suggested to Esther and Mordechai to "inscribe, regarding the Jews, as you please, and seal it with the king's seal." On the 23rd of Sivan, Mordechai drafted a royal decree giving the Jews the license to defend themselves and kill all who rise up against them to kill them and dispatched it to all 127 provinces of Achashverosh's empire.

Passing of Rabbi Yaakov Pollack (1541)

Rabbi Yaakov Pollack served as rabbi first in Prague and then in Cracow. In Cracow he established a large yeshiva that attracted thousands of students. Rabbi Yaakov devised a new method of Talmudic study known as pilpul, with the goal of stimulating the intellectual abilities of his students. Although many scholars of subsequent generations opposed this method, Rabbi Yaakov succeeded in bringing about a renewal of Talmudic study in Poland, which became a major Torah

center for the next four centuries. He passed away on 23 Sivan 5301 (1541).

Shabbat, 25 Sivan 5785 - 21 June 2025

Egyptians Sue Jews (4th Century BCE)

Egyptian representatives appeared in the court of Alexander the Great, demanding that the Jews pay restitution for all the Egyptian gold and silver they took along with them during the Exodus. Geviha the son of Pesisa, a simple but wise Jew, requested the sages' permission to present a defense on behalf of the Jews.

Geviha asked the Egyptians for evidence that the Jews absconded with their wealth. "The crime is clearly recorded in your Torah," the Egyptians gleefully responded.

"In that case," Geviha said, "the Torah also says that 600,000 Jews were unjustly enslaved by the Egyptians for many, many years. So first let us calculate how much you owe us..."

The court granted the Egyptians three days in which to prepare a response. When they were unable to do so they fled on the following day and never returned.

In Talmudic times, the day when the Egyptian delegation fled was celebrated as a mini-holiday.

Three of the "Ten Martyrs" Killed (2nd century CE)

Among the millions of Jews cruelly killed by the Romans were the "Ten Martyrs" - all great sages and leaders of Israel - who were executed by the Romans and are memorialized in a special prayer recited on Yom Kippur. Three of them - Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel, Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha and Rabbi Chanina S'gan Hakohanim - were killed on the 25th of Sivan in the 2nd century CE.