



# Sermon Tidbits

MAY 31, 2010

## Parashat Shelach

### Critical Limits

**Miketz arbaim yom – “...at the end of forty days” (Numbers 13:25)**

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The Torah states that the spies returned from their mission to scout the Land after only 40 days, a timeframe in which they physically could not have completed the task. According to Rashi (based on Midrash Tanchuma Shelach 8), the spies' journey was miraculously expedited. Why? Rashi states that God foresaw the spies' negative report and the dire consequences which it would have. As the Torah later states (in 14:34), there was a direct correlation between the length of the spies' outing and the punishment which the nation received for believing their false report: “After the number of the days in which you spied out the land, 40 days, for every day a year shall you bear your sins.” If the amount of time which the spies had scouted the land had not been limited to 40 days, then the Jewish people would have suffered in the desert for more than 40 years. Thus, rather than leaving the length of the expedition—and the punishment—to chance, it was miraculously shortened.

Today, Congress has learned the power of timing and not leaving matters to chance. By placing a deadline to pass new Iran sanctions legislation, our Representatives have expressed their dedication to preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

In a joint statement to the press, Senate Banking Committee Chairman Christopher Dodd (D-CT) and House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman (D-CA) announced that they intend to pass tough, comprehensive Iran sanctions legislation in June, stating that there is “a limited amount of time for those efforts.” The Conference Committee co-chairs have set this timetable for final passage to reinforce the Obama Administration's efforts to obtain approval of a new United Nations Security Council resolution prior to the June 16 European Foreign Ministers meeting, which could lead to a European Union action on Iran. Chairmen Dodd and Berman's firm public commitment to get comprehensive Iran sanctions legislation to the President before the July 4th recess represents a critical step towards crippling economic sanctions on Iran meant to convince the Islamic Republic to abandon its nuclear weapons program. President Obama should immediately sign and implement the legislation as soon as it arrives on his desk. For more on Iran, visit [www.aipac.org/Iran](http://www.aipac.org/Iran).

Rashi notes that by capping the amount of time in which the spies scouted the Land, God protected the Jewish nation from further consequence. Now, with Congress understanding this lesson, every effort should be made for additional Iran sanctions legislation to be signed into law by Congress' July 4<sup>th</sup> recess. ■

### A Land Flowing with Opportunity

**V'gam zavav chalav v'devash hu – “It surely flows with milk and honey” (Numbers 13:27)**

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Why does the Torah describe the Land of Israel as flowing with milk and honey? While many commentators interpret the verse literally, others view the phrase figuratively (see the argument of Rabbi Eliezer and Akiva in the Mechilta D'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai 13:5 as to whether the phrase refers to fruit juice or actual milk). According to S'forno, on Exodus 3:8, the phrase actually refers to “an abundance of cattle and produce, and a land that is harmonious and

beneficial.” While a debate remains as to whether the phrase is literal or figurative, one thing is certain: the Land offered the material wealth to sustain the Jewish people.

Recognizing the economic viability of the Land, the spies referred to it as a place flowing with milk and honey. Were they to scout the Land of Israel today, they might praise it as a land flowing with biotechnology and business opportunity instead.

In June, Israel will host Biomed 2010—the second largest biotech convention in the world. While originally the event was attended mainly by Israeli academics, it has grown in recent years to attract the biggest names in the pharmaceutical business, and has been instrumental in closing multi-million dollar deals. Held by the Israel Life Science Industry, a corporation representing the mutual goals of the Israeli life science community, the Biomedical Innovation Summit conference will host over 7,000 visitors, including some of the world’s most sought-after opinion leaders in the field of biotechnology. In addition to the business opportunities at the convention, attendees come to Israel to “learn about advances in the industry from some of those whose research is at the apex of their fields,” including applications in cardiology, vaccines, oncology, personalized medication and metabolic diseases, the website [Israel21c.org](http://Israel21c.org) reports. Biomed 2010 serves as a powerful demonstration of Israel’s remarkable scientific community, its entrepreneurial spirit, and a culture and economy which encourages the formation of new companies that bring advanced innovations to the world.

While in biblical times the Land of Israel’s resources were measured in agricultural terms, in modern times, as the Biomed 2010 conference shows, innovation is one of Israel’s greatest resources. ■

## Confidence in Commitments

### **Ki tavoh’u el Aretz moh’shevoteichem – “When you come to the Land of your habitation” (Numbers 15:2)**

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Why does the Torah describe the commandments specific to the Land of Israel immediately following the decree that the nation must wander in the desert for 40 years? Ohr Hachayyim (on 15:2) explains that the language emanates “from God’s appreciation for their despondency following their decreed 40 year wandering in the desert, [and their] denied entry into the Land. For this reason God fed their hearts...to elevate their spirits that they would go up and inherit their Land.” Therefore, the timing in which the laws specific to the Land were given was meant to reassure the younger generation that, despite the sin of the spies, they would ultimately enter the Promised Land.

The timing of the description of the commandments specific to the Land of Israel may be one of the earliest listings of a confidence building measure. Nowadays, the value of such efforts is not forgotten, especially by Israel—which recently announced new steps designed to build confidence in its commitment to a two state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As Israel and the Palestinians continue with proximity talks aimed at reaching a peace agreement, the Israeli government has taken a series of steps to ease Palestinian movement in the West Bank and facilitate humanitarian assistance. Since September 2009, Israel has removed more than 210 roadblocks and checkpoints in the West Bank. On May 24, Israel announced that it will soon bolster these measures by removing an additional 60 roadblocks and allowing greater access on several key Palestinian roads. According to Dr. Robert Danin, Head of Mission for the Office of the Quartet Representative, “Some of these steps are significant and should improve the economic and living conditions of the West Bank Palestinian population.” Amid these Israeli steps, the West Bank’s gross domestic product grew last year by more than nine percent and the stock market’s Al-Quds Index increased by nearly 12 percent. For more on Israeli measures to boost the West Bank economy, click [here](#).

By working to ease travel restrictions and increase economic development in the West Bank, not only is Israel mimicking the type of confidence building measure described in the Torah, it is also working to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict once and for all. ■