

JUNE 13, 2011

## Parashat Shelach

### Selfish Leadership

Send one man each from his father's tribe (Numbers 13:2)      איש אחד למטה אבתיו תשלחו (במדבר יג:ב)

What inner motivation prompted the spies to speak negatively about the Land of Israel and goad the nation to return to Egypt? The Zohar (See Targum Zohar 3:158) explains that they acted, first and foremost, out of self-interest. "They took for themselves evil advice saying, 'If Israel enters the Land, we will be removed from our leadership positions—for Moses appointed us as leaders in the desert, but he won't appoint us as leaders in the Land.'" Therefore, the Zohar explains that it was out of their own desire to retain prominence and power, they deliberately devised a negative report that would provoke the people to protest and ultimately prevent the nation from entering into the Promised Land.

The spies selfishly manipulated the Israelites in order to retain their leadership positions. In a desperate attempt to maintain its firm grip over the Syrian people, the Assad regime has followed in the spies' footsteps by encouraging protests against Israel in order to deflect attention from its own inhumane behavior.

The Syrian government recently allowed hundreds of people to approach the border with Israel—for the second time in a month—leaving Israel with no choice but to use force, as a last resort when other methods of dispersal failed. Moreover, Syrian sources claimed that these two instances represented only a "preview" of an extended campaign against Israel, the newspaper *Yediot Achronot* reported. "The Syrian government-owned *Tishreen* newspaper warned that the recent 'Naksa Day' and 'Nakba Day' protests were just a preview for the 'greater flow of crowds' that are soon to storm Israel's borders. 'What happened the day before yesterday in the occupied Golan was just a preamble to a greater flow of crowds who have no limits on the way to liberation and return,' the editorial read." Israeli and international officials rejected the notion of a popular Syrian uprising, placing the blame for the protests squarely at the feet of the Syrian leadership. The regime both prompted and permitted the protesters to reach the border in order to take attention away from its own deadly crackdown on a popular uprising, *The Washington Post* reported. "I can't say that the Syrian government used its full weight to stop this provocation," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in remarks broadcast by Israel Radio. "It ultimately enabled these people to reach the border. It could be that this is an attempt to divert international attention from the wholesale killing of civilians that is happening in Syrian cities."

By using the people to maintain their own power, the spies brought about their own demise and caused needless tragedy to the entire Jewish nation. Similar efforts by Syria will not only hurt the Syrians themselves, but will only further weaken the legitimacy of the brutal Assad regime. ■

### Standing Apart from Evil

And he came to Hebron (Number 13:22)

ויבא עד חברון (במדבר יג:כב)

According to Rambam, it is in man's nature to follow the actions of his friends and neighbors (Laws of Attitudes, 6:1). "For this reason, a person must attach himself to the righteous...so that he will learn from their actions, and distance himself from the wicked who walk in darkness." This comment helps explain Caleb's actions as the spies explored the Promised Land. While "They [the spies] went up into the Negev," we read that, "he [Caleb] came to

Hebron.” Rashi (on 13:22) explains that, “Caleb alone went there and prostrated himself on the graves of the righteous, so that he would not be seduced by his fellow [spies] to participate in their plan.”

Caleb demonstrated that by staying away from that which is wrong, we not only express our disapproval and disagreement, but also help prevent others from associating us with those corrupt aims. The United States is following suit by opting to stay away from an upcoming U.N. conference that has been characteristically anti-Israeli.

The United States has announced that it will not attend the 10-year commemoration of a U.N. conference on combating racism scheduled to take place in New York on September 21, citing that past meetings have included “ugly displays of intolerance and anti-Semitism,” [Bloomberg](#) reported. The announcement was made in a letter from Acting Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Macmanus to Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). Last December, Gillibrand and a bipartisan group of 17 other senators wrote to U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice, urging the United States not to participate in the conference. Noting that the U.N. chose to convene the conference in New York just days after the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the senators [wrote](#), “It is important that the United States send a strong signal that another anti-Semitic and anti-American Durban Conference, particularly held so close to the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and location of the worst terrorist attack in American history, is unacceptable.”

Realizing the destructive goals of his fellow spies, Caleb distanced himself from them, choosing to explore the Land on his own. The Obama Administration has wisely acted in a similar manner, by staying away from a potentially destructive and anti-Semitic U.N. conference, truly leading by example. ■

## A Land Flowing with World-Renowned Wine

It surely flows with milk and honey (Numbers 13:27)

וגם זבת חלב ודבש היא (במדבר יג:כז)

As a symbol of the fertility of the Land of Israel, the spies returned to the desert with, “one cluster of grapes, and they bore it upon a pole between two” (Numbers 13:23). Yet, a fascinating [article](#) by Dr. Chazonael Tuito of Bar Ilan University explains that according to most opinions, the image is inaccurate. Commentaries from the Talmud (Sotah 34a) through modern times note that if they carried the cluster on a pole, why then does the text add that it was “between two.” Isn’t that fact obvious? Numerous commentaries suggest that the grapes were so large and heavy that one pole would not suffice. For this reason, the spies devised a system of at least two poles, carried by up to eight men (see Rashi on 13:23).

In fact, these questions and discrepancies highlight that the grapes carried by the spies were of such extraordinary size that they represented all that was good in the Land of Israel. Nowadays, wines produced in the Jewish state are serving this same function.

“Golan Heights [Winery] received the Gran Vinality Special Award as the best wine producer out of 1,000 competitors from 30 countries at the 19<sup>th</sup> International Vinality 2011 Wine Competition earlier this spring in Verona, Italy,” the website [Israel21c](#) reported. A panel of 105 leading winemakers and wine journalists awarded Golan as the wine producer achieving the best overall results. Golan earned two of Vinality’s 16 coveted Grand Gold Medals, for its 2009 Yarden Chardonnay Odem Organic Vineyard and its 2008 Yarden Heights Wine. “We are extremely proud of being the first Israeli winery to be named the best wine producer at Vinality—the top award at one of the world’s most prominent wine competitions,” said Anat Levi, CEO of Golan Heights Winery. In addition to expertise in the field, one of the primary factors in producing such acclaimed wines is, of course, location. “Within the prime Mediterranean wine growing region, Israel is blessed with a unique combination of latitude, elevation and volcanic soil—all key factors in winemaking.”

The spies, who struggled to carry the unwieldy grapes of the Holy Land back to the people, surely would have agreed. These awards are not only a coup for Israel’s winemakers, they represent the power of fertility in the Land of Israel. ■