



Yeshivat Ma'alot

Parashat Shelach

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ישיבת מעלות

פרשת שלח

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Changing Leadership, Changing Times

Imagine, a hundred years ago, an Eastern European shtetel. Within its borders live a few hundred families, and at the center of everyone's life were the local shul and the rabbi. For every question, every problem, every complaint, the townspeople turned to their trusty rabbi for guidance and leadership. Now imagine that one day a messenger arrived from afar with unbelievable news - "We are all going to move to Eretz Yisrael! Men, women, children, community leaders - no one will be left behind! There we will be able to serve Hashem in joy and tranquility." Yet this will require an essential change in day-to-day life. The rabbi will no longer be the final address for every issue or problem. Professional workers will be responsible for handling dilemmas and for ensuring that daily life runs smoothly and properly. National government offices will replace local committees. These people will obviously be chosen according to their skill level and not necessarily by their religious devotion. At first, this could cause a spiritual downfall of the townspeople. Having to establish a state, an army, and an economic system could be an enormous challenge. The messenger concludes, "We must strive to accomplish this goal and at the same time uplift the nation's spiritual level".

This story is not so far fetched. The return to Eretz Yisrael, Shivat Tzion, with all of its hardships and difficulties, is taking place today, and took place in the desert over three thousand years ago. As Bnei Yisrael stood to enter Eretz Yisrael they had to undergo fundamental changes in their everyday life. If in the desert they received all of their sustenance from heaven, they learned Torah directly from Moshe Rabbeinu, and the central point of their lives was the Mishkan, which was in the center of their camp, life in Eretz Yisrael would be very different. Each tribe would inherit its own land and the people would need to be ready for many years of battles. Such changes would also affect the leadership of the people. The type of leadership that was in the desert was not the type of leadership that would be effective in Eretz Yisrael.

In this week's parasha we read about the *Chet Hameraglim*. A delegation of twelve spies was sent to Eretz Yisrael to scout out the land and the people dwelling within it. When they returned, the spies frightened Bnei Yisrael by their report, Bnei Yisrael panicked, and as a result it was decreed that that generation should not enter

Eretz Yisrael. The Zohar on Parashat Shlach teaches¹ us that these spies were not only heads of the twelve tribes they were also great tzadikim. In spite of this, these leaders deliberately slandered Eretz Yisrael because they were afraid of being replaced when the nation enters the land.

If the spies were such great tzadikim, then how could it be that they were afraid of being replaced? It is therefore obvious that they did not slander Eretz Yisrael because they had their own personal interests in mind. They understood that as Bnei Yisrael would move into their new homeland, their relationship towards Hashem would change. Over the course of their time in the desert, Hashem directly provided everything Bnei Yisrael needed. In turn they did not have any physical worries - they were able to completely devote themselves to learning Torah and basking in the great light of Hashem. Upon entering Eretz Yisrael, all this would change. Bnei Yisrael would no longer serve Hashem by being disconnected from the physical world. It was Hashem's will that Bnei Yisrael would serve Him by connecting to the physical world, even if serving Him in such a manner could, cause a spiritual downfall. It was this downfall that the spies wanted to prevent.

A leader must know when times have changed. He must know when the time has come to change leadership. A true leader is one who is able to grasp that the challenges of the generation have changed and to know when it is necessary to bring in new leaders. Rather than trying to hinder and prevent upcoming change, a true leader is one who helps to usher in the new times. He realizes that it is ultimately the will of Hashem that these changes will be brought about.

¹ Zohar, Vol. 3, 158a