

Parshas Shelach

This week's parsha, Shelach, narrates the story of the spies and the subsequent punishment of the nation. Despite the negative experiences depicted, the parsha concludes with the Mitzvos that the 'next generation' will uphold, particularly those related to the Land of Israel. This emphasis on the 'next generation' serves as a beacon of hope, highlighting the continuity and resilience of the Jewish faith.

As we discussed previously in Parshas Bamidbar when discussing the counting of the Tribe of Levi, they weren't counted among the number of the Jews; Rashi explained that the Leviim didn't sin by the spies and, therefore, weren't subjected to the penalties begot by the rest of the nation. In 14:33, Rashi explains the reason behind the 40 years that while their sentence began with the Eigel, it was only completed after the spies' sin; it stands to reason, as I explained there, that the Jews were given a chance to repent. Since everyone would live past 60, they had to wait another 38 years until the entire nation, which was counted from 20-60 at the time of redemption, would expire in their 60th year. Since this experience occurred in their second year, 38 years remained to cull the demographic from 20-60; every year, as the next wave of people reached 60, they would pass away. All new people born during this time would be the next generation entering the land.

Since Levi was counted from a different age group, they were not counted here and were not subject to the demise of the

rest of the nation. It is important to note, from the Gemara in Moed Katan 28a, that the reason the age 60 was the cutoff is so that they should know that they passed because of a heavenly decree and not because of some other punishment, such as Kares, which the Gemara explains happens earlier (based on a statement by Mar Zutra from Job 5:26). The divine decree of death at the age of 60 means that the people were still given a chance to live an entire life, in the way they wanted, which was enshrined, and cloaked in the glory of Hashem's divinity and protection. This divine protection was a reason, as explained by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, for their desire to remain in the desert. Why would they want to leave the glory and participate in the mundane, physical realm that would require them to leave the confines of this blanketed existence? This generation was too disconnected from reality; having seen the Hand of Hashem and the giving of the Torah, they couldn't fathom an existence requiring physical involvement. This would explain why the Leviim may not have been tempted by the same. Their entire existence was to remain in the service of Hashem, and they would be taken care of by the rest of the nation, e.g. they weren't apportioned the land; instead, they were supported by the general public. Furthermore, because they were in the divine service from childhood, they would remain cloaked, so to speak, in divinity. Their existence wouldn't have radically differed from what they were doing in the desert.

This would explain why the first mitzvah in Perek 15 was one of the fire offerings given periodically or on the holidays. To remind us that not only will you have

Mitzvos, but you will also participate in the land, which is a reassurance to everyone, including those not subjugated by the decree of the spies, that there will be a moment of entry into the land as promised. So, there should be no fear that anyone would remain in the desert. Furthermore, one could posit why the voluntary fire offering brought periodically or on the holidays is the first commandment when there are other Mitzvos, like Shemitta, that could have been used to tell people, “Not only will you come into the land, but you will also be there long enough to go through a grow cycle.” Instead, they were explicitly reminded of the holidays and that Hashem wants us to connect with him as we would by offering a fire offering, which is brought voluntarily and periodically. Rashi, in 15:3, specifically points out the fire offering brought explicitly on the holidays, which supports the point above about Hashem giving us the holidays as a constant reminder and multiple chances to reconnect throughout the year.

We know Hashem sprinkled moments of connection by filling our calendar with Holy days, which keeps up with the continuous connection to Hashem since our purpose is not to remain cloaked in refusal and obscured from reality. Rather, we must be participants in the mundane and till the earth, and work on it and ourselves to bring, through work, everything closer to Hashem by drawing down the Divine or by uplifting the physical. Just as one would find a connection to Hashem by bringing the fire offering, so shall be the connection to Hashem, at all times or any time, something that is not unique to the desert.

Interestingly, the fire offering includes a Ram (15:6) as a gift Korban. The Ram was a substitute for Yitzchak by the Akeida, meaning it takes the place of the human. This means there may be symbolism here, that this offering reflects a replacement of the need for punishment by swapping in a Ram. What Hashem may be saying here is that in place of the sentence, as seen by the spies, our service and connection and gifts to Hashem would be like the Ram substitution of the sacrifice of Yitzchak.

Hashem also gave us the Mitzvah of Tzitzis, which is at the conclusion of the Parsha. This mitzvah is one we can keep, and even in our times, we can always be connected to Hashem. The whole Mitzvah is to cloak ourselves in a garment of spirituality at all times of day (and night). Moreover, as Rashi explains at 15:39, the numerical value of Tzitzis is 600, plus the eight threads and five knots totalling 613 because we are always cloaked in Mitzvos and Hashem again, which is not something unique to the desert.

Hashem basks in this gift to him and rewards us handsomely with the blessings of our lives on a daily basis. But we are also at a time when we beseech Hashem to reduce our enemies to rubble and usher in the final redemption, as we are ready to cash in our chips for our hard work.

Good Shabbos