

Meshech Chochma

- Jacob Solomon

Sh'lach

"Your children shall roam in the wilderness for 40 years... in accordance with the number of days that you spied out the Land: 40 days, a day for a year, a day for a year... and you shall understand [the consequences of] your straying from Me" (14:33-34)

The main content of the parasha is the narrative of the Spies. The Israelites believed the 10 Spies' negative report and its implications, and they were on the verge of rebellion against Moshe and Aharon with: "Let us appoint a leader so we may return to Egypt" (14:4). Following Moshe's impassioned plea on their behalf, G-d rescinded His decree to wipe out the Israelites with plague, and instead decreed that they may not enter the Promised Land for an entire forty year period.

The decree, however, appears to lack the usual characteristic of G-d's method of punishment: MIDA K'NEGED MIDA, measure for measure. For those who indeed spied out the Land died very soon afterwards: "in a plague before G-d" (14:37). But the rest appeared to have had nothing to do with the number forty: they had simply demonstrated

crowd hysteria to the report of the Spies when they eventually returned. That did not take 40 days, possibly it did not even take 40 minutes. What direct connection did the Israelites have with the number 40 so that they would be punished 'day for a year' for 40 years?

In response, the S'forno offers the following insight. G-d had pronounced the sentence of forty years in the wilderness in the framework of: "You shall understand [the consequences of] your straying from Me". S'forno explains that it means that as a result of the long years of wandering, the Israelites would understand the magnitude of the sin of having negated G-d's intent of bringing them into the Land. That last part is important: on having negated G-d's intent of bringing them into the Land.

The Meshech Chochma brings an additional dimension, which communicates a certain irony to the use of the number 40. The 10 Spies had declared that the reason that the Israelites would not be able to conquer the Land was because the people there were "too strong for us" (13:31). This, emphasizes the Meshech Chochma, gets us to the core of the panic of the people. The Israelites were not fighters, they were not people grounded in military tactics.

Their background and status until very recently was slaves to the Egyptians, not conquistadores on the march. Fighting was not their thing at all: "they are too strong for us". Their underlying attitude was to let the next generation who knew not slavery be the ones to make the invasion. In effect they were saying: Let's put this off for another 40 years or so that our children's generation will come of age and experience and be able to take on the conquest.

Which opens a window to the number 40: a new generation, another 40 years. G-d's reply was: Let them have it: 40 years in the desert, ironically turning out to be "in accordance with the number of days that you spied out the Land: 40 days, a day for a year, a day for a year... and you shall understand [the consequences of] your straying from Me." Your being too anxious to put off the conquest because of feeling more like slaves than soldiers was an act of negating G-d's intend to bring them into the Land.

People frequently find themselves in situations where their instinct is: "It's not for me. How can I get out of this?" We can learn from this that if G-d puts us in a situation, it is our job to handle it as well as we can, not putting it off with the excuses of "I'm

too young, I'm too inexperienced, I'm past the age for that sort of thing, It's not my sort of thing" and so on. By all means ask for advice, but as G-d gave the situation to you, it is your business to deal with.

Not to run away from it... e