

*Sh'lach* / 26 Sivan, 5775 / June 13, 2015

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פְּרִי-הָאָרֶץ--הָאֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְתֶּנּוּ; וְגַם זֶבֶת הַלֶּבֶב וּדְבַשׁ, הָיָא--בְּאֵנֹו אֵל.

Num. 13:27 *We came to the land to which you sent us; indeed it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.*

In the Torah text of this week, Moses sends out men from each of the tribes to scout out the land which they will inhabit. He asks them: "Are the people who dwell in it strong or weak, few or many? Is the country in which they live good or bad? Are the towns in which they live open or fortified?" (Num. 13:18-19) All of these first questions carry with them Moses' concern of whether or not the Israelites will be able to conquer the land. Yet, Moses is equally concerned with the viability of the physical land on which the people could live and thrive. He asks: "Is the soil rich or poor? Is it wooded or not? Make an effort to bring back some of the fruit of the land." (Num. 13:20)

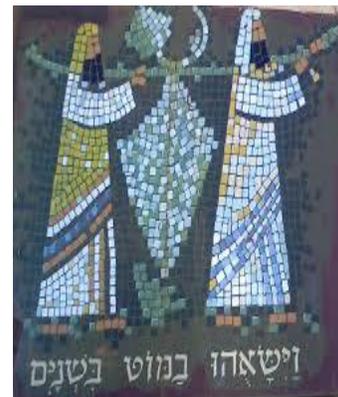
The reports about the viability of the land were incredibly positive. We are told that the scouts' expedition took place during grape season. The samples they cut down were so huge that one cluster had to be carried by two men. This particular verse has led to the iconic images we find on ancient coins, mosaics and even modern artwork, postage stamps and more.

The scouts are also said to have found pomegranates and figs. In showing Moses their samples of fruit, the scouts mention that indeed the land flows with milk and honey which Joshua later reiterates.

We are also told that two of the scouts or spies reported that the land might be able to be conquered. This report seemingly demoralizes the people. One commentator tells us that this report was particularly vexing on the population that had been born in Egypt, into slavery. Perhaps this was a generation that was not capable of being free people in their own nation. Their memory was of harsh times and they could not imagine conquering the land.

There are two themes to explore: agriculture in the land and generations that suffer and what do they do about their suffering; do they take destiny into their own hands, do they take a challenge and turn it into an opportunity?

Here are some thoughts on the first theme: agriculture. Today, like in ancient days, the production of crops and agriculture in Israel



#### Additional References:

[Mikveh Israel Agricultural School Marks 60th Year](#) - JTA, September 3, 1930

[Groundwork laid for First Aliyah by BILU](#)

[Anti-Semitism on American college campuses is rising—and worsening. Where does it come from, and can it be stopped?](#) Ruth Wisse, May 4, 2015, Mosaic Magazine,

thrives. But, it was not always the case. In the early years that predated the establishment of the State of Israel, the land was disease ridden and inhospitable due to human neglect and a naturally arid climate in which it was difficult to grow. The early immigrants worked very hard and used tremendous ingenuity to develop the land that would reflect the fertile place reported by the scouts. When early Zionist pioneers chose rural settings, were they rejecting their former urban lives in eastern and western Europe, where they had no right to own land? Return to the land became a major theme of the early Zionists; it also meant taking one's own destiny into your own hands, a central theme of Zionism.

Theodore Herzl's dream to have a Jewish State that could offer independence to its people necessitated a rich and fertile land. The establishment of the Mikveh Israel School in 1870 offered a training ground to bring this dream to a reality. The Agricultural Research Organization (ARO), a leading institution of agricultural research and development, had its start as Tel Aviv's "Agricultural Station," which from 1921 worked to bring Israel to the forefront of agricultural research, development of techniques and production.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. The Bilu Movement were pioneers of the First Aliyah, who came from religious communities in Eastern Europe. When they encountered Palestine, they became very focused on the need for agricultural development, despite their inexperience with farming. Discuss the intersection of religious commitment and a desire to "be tillers of the soil."
2. The second theme asks if people are prepared to meet a challenge. Why did some like Ben-Gurion fear in the days before the Declaration of Israel's Independence that declaring a Jewish state might be the wrong decision? Our sources tell us that he and others feared a second Holocaust within three years of the end of WWII. Fear had to be overcome.
3. Why in American history do some refer to those who lived through the depression in Europe as "the greatest generation ever?" What distinguishes individuals and groups that accept challenges and turn them into opportunities from others who do not take up the challenge? What should Jewish students, faculty and staff do on university campuses today? Should they accept the derision from the BDS advocates or stand up for what they believe? The question rides on if those students, faculty and staff know what a Jewish state means to them. Do they know what to stand up for and how to articulate it?