

## **Shelach, 5780 – Rabbi Dr. Zev Wiener**

The story of the Spies is easily among the most heart-wrenching stories in the entire Tanach. After everything that the Jewish people had experienced -- gaining freedom from Egypt, receiving the Torah, healing the wounds of the Golden Calf -- their singular dream of entering the Land of Israel is irrevocably dashed over the span of a few minutes. Despondency, panic, and depression propagate throughout the nation as the reality of what has just transpired begins to set in.

And then, out of the blue, the Torah transitions to an ostensibly unrelated topic, the obligation to offer items (e.g., wine, flour, oil) to accompany certain personal sacrifices. What is most curious about the placement of this law is that it was completely inapplicable to that generation, as the obligation to offer accompaniments to personal sacrifices only applied in the Land of Israel:

"... 'כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל אֶרֶץ מְוֹשְׁבֵיהֶיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם ... -- "And it will be when you enter the land of your dwelling that I am giving to you..." (Bamidbar 15:2)

The placement of this Mitzvah thus begs the obvious question: why does the Torah immediately go from banning that generation of Jews from the Land of Israel, to immediately detailing a commandment that only applies in the Land of Israel?

Rashi (ibid.) offers a fascinating explanation:

"בשר להם שיכנסו לארץ"

"(The Torah) is notifying them that they will enter the Land."

That is, the Torah is consoling these Jews who felt as though they had just lost everything: even though you yourself will not enter the Land, *your children will enter the Land*, and they will carry on your mission. Don't give up. It doesn't end with you.

Being a Jew is about more than personal ritual performance. It is about seeing beyond the details of one's personal life, and perceiving oneself as an essential part of something far greater than him or herself; something which began long before him or her, and which will continue long afterwards. When one lives disconnected from the past and future, life may become meaningless and fragmented, and the inevitable passage of time renders one's lifespan a speck of dust in the span of history. But when one sees his or her life as a critical link in the chain of the world's spiritual destiny, it changes everything. Every action of his or her life, no

matter how small, takes on eternal significance, connected to all that ever was and all that will ever be.

The Talmud teaches (Sanhedrin 104), "ברא מזכי אבא" -- a child can bring merit to a parent, even after the parent passes away. This is true not only on the individual level, but also on the national level. Just as the children of the generation of the Spies would fulfill the Mitzvot that their parents could not do, we have the ability to further the legacy of all those who came before us. Every time we study Torah and fulfill Mitzvot, we retroactively justify the efforts of millions of Jews throughout the generations who risked or sacrificed their lives to perpetuate Torah observance. We become descendants to those who never had descendants.

I recall once hearing a rabbi who had volunteered to serve in the Israeli Army describe that throughout his army service, he felt as though he was carrying the six million holy souls of the Holocaust in his backpack. No matter how exhausted or afraid he ever felt, he couldn't give up, because he was doing this for them. This is how each one of us should feel every day, whether we are in the army or not -- whatever pain or misery may sometimes make us feel like quitting, we have to continue marching forward, because we're not just doing this for ourselves.

Living for someone and something beyond ourselves can be a source of immense strength, meaning, and comfort, charging us with responsibility and reassuring us that our work will continue long after we leave. May our efforts to actualize "התקווה בת שנות אלפיים" -- the hopes and dreams of Jews for thousands of years, bear fruit, and may we too be blessed to witness a complete and speedy return to the land of HaKadosh Baruch Hu in our own generation.