

SEFER ALIYOS REFOEL ZEV ON THE PARSHA

Parshas Massai

Purity of Motivation

The final chapter of *Sefer Bamidbar* relates the story that took place when Moshe was approached by the leaders of the family of Gilad, from the tribe of Menashe. The leaders came to voice their concerns regarding the five daughters of Tzelafchad. Tzelafchad, a member of the tribe of Menashe, had died in the desert without leaving behind any male heirs to inherit his portion in the Land of Israel. As per Hashem's command, Tzelafchad's daughters were now slated to receive this portion. However, this land would not necessarily remain the property of the Menashe tribe. Were Tzelafchad's daughters to marry men from outside their tribe, their inheritance would go to their husbands or children upon their death, never to return to the tribe of Menashe. The leaders of the family of Gilad expressed to Moshe their displeasure with the prospect of their tribe's portion being diminished.

According to *Sforno*, the family leaders were actually worried that the inheritance reserved for Tzelafchad's daughters may not become part of Menashe's tribal plot at all. They feared that those who would be charged with the mission of conquering this particular section of land – namely, men from the tribe of Menashe – may be unmotivated to do so, knowing that the land would eventually leave the tribe. There was a real possibility, argued the family leaders, that the native inhabitants of the area in question might be left in place, and the land not secured for the Children of Israel. Moshe's response, as per Hashem's command, validated these concerns. The daughters of Tzelafchad were commanded by Moshe to marry only men from within their own tribe. The fighters from Menashe were thus assured that the inheritance would remain the territory of their tribe, and would be sufficiently motivated to properly conquer it.

The scenario which the Gilad family leaders dreaded seems a little bit far-fetched. Conquering and inhabiting the Land of Israel is a tremendous mitzvah. In fact, the prohibition against instructing a gentile to perform prohibited work on the Sabbath (*amira l'akum*) is waived for the sake of this mitzvah.^[1] Surely the importance of this mitzvah was not lost on those men who fought to conquer the Land of Israel from its native inhabitants.

There were other considerations as well. The dangers of leaving behind the spiritually destructive indigent population should have been compelling reason to properly conquer the territory. Furthermore, it would stand to reason that the soldiers of Menashe would want to help secure the inheritance for their close relatives, the daughters of Tzelafchad. Why should the fact that the land may not remain in the hands of the Menashe tribe in the long term hamper them in achieving this goal?

Perhaps even more surprising than the initial lack of enthusiasm that would have plagued the troops from Menashe is the fact that it could not be easily overcome. The Gilad family heads were well aware of the possibility that their men may fail to conquer Tzelafchad's plot. They could have mounted an effort to exhort the rank and file to conquer the land in spite of their personal misgivings. Wouldn't the troops have been able to overcome their seemingly selfish considerations after having been admonished explicitly to do so? Why was it necessary for Hashem to circumvent the problem altogether by prohibiting the daughters of Tzelafchad from marrying outside their tribe?

Hashem's response to the situation highlights a valuable lesson. Even great men, such as those from Menashe entrusted with the task of conquering the Land, may find it difficult to adequately motivate themselves with only pure intentions. For these men, the prospect of conquering land for their own tribe for perpetuity was a powerful motivating tool that could not necessarily be replaced by more lofty aspirations. The mitzvah of conquering the Land of Israel, great as it may be, may not have propelled these men sufficiently to execute their mission successfully. Even while being aware of their lack of motivation, and its cause, they may not have been able to work on themselves enough to significantly change their attitude. In this instance, they needed to know that the results of their efforts would be a more complete inheritance for their tribe.

Performing *mitzvos* with only the purest of intentions is a very challenging and daunting goal. As much as we work on refining our intentions, we may sometimes find that we are more motivated by our own self-interest than by serving Hashem. Being aware of the difficulty of serving Hashem properly and always acting *l'shem shamayim* enables us to redouble our efforts. If we focus on this goal, cognizant of the challenges involved in its realization, we can, with Hashem's help, come ever closer to achieving it. ❖

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[1] A Jew may instruct a gentile on the Sabbath to write a document with which the Jew will purchase property in Israel from a gentile – *Gittin 8b*.