

## CHAPTER 2, VERSES 14-15

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel

### (2, 14)

*And the men said to her, "Our souls are in place of you, providing you don't repeat these words."* The spies literally pledged their lives, if necessary, to rescue Rachav and her family from any danger that could befall them. Although this appears to be a noble offer, it presents great difficulty to us. In general, one is forbidden to seriously endanger his life for the sake of another, because, as the Talmud puts it, "Who said that his blood is redder than mine?" One may certainly never prioritize the life of a foreigner over his own. Yet the spies did so, seemingly without any precedent for their behavior.

We will attempt to offer an understanding to this in the following context. Maimonides teaches us an important principle regarding faith and action in his Guide to the Perplexed. He explains that a pious person can, at times, be possessed by a spirit of Hashem which gives him a sense of counsel and strength to fearlessly battle major armies. Maimonides cites as an example Yehonoson the son of Shaul who single-handedly defeated the entire camp of the Philistines. Malbim (see comment to Breishis 14:14) adds to this list the war that Avraham Avinu waged and won against the four mighty powers of the world. From this we learn that the power of faith is so strong that it can yield untold results under the most impossible circumstances.

With the above insight we can appreciate the position of the spies and their sense of obligation. Our Rabbis teach us (see Shemos Rabba 4:2) "If one opens the door for his friend, he is indebted to him with his life." This statement teaches us that our obligation of gratitude knows no bounds, and if one was spared in a time of need, he would owe virtually everything. In this light we see the spies were truly indebted to Rachav, because she risked her own life to save them. They therefore pledged to protect her and her loved ones at all costs. If necessary they would be willing to place themselves in danger for her sake and with total faith in Hashem would await His salvation. Rachav truly deserved to be rescued by Hashem and, knowing this, it was clear to them that Hashem would deliver her, regardless of the extent of danger involved. The Spies were totally over taken by the spirit of Hashem and knew with confidence that their mission would prove successful, like Avraham and Yehonoson.

*"And when Hashem will give us the land, we will act towards you with kindness and truth."* Rachav initially requested that the spies show kindness to her family. They responded; however, that this rescue mission would be an act of kindness to her rather than to her family. In addition, they made a

point of reiterating Rachav's proclamation that Hashem was delivering the land to the Jews, and not the Jews themselves.

These observations support the idea we shared earlier about Rachav's request for this rescue. After reviewing the role she played in Hashem's war, Rachav maintained that it was only proper and truthful for her household to be spared. In response to this, the spies expressed their consent to her argument that the glory of Hashem was a true concern here. Since it was obvious that Hashem was fighting this war, it could be expected that He would recognize Rachav's active role in the scheme of things. She truly deserved to be repaid with kindness, and, as a sign of this appreciation, the spies pledged in the name of Hashem to repay her by sparing her entire family.

## **(2,15)**

*"And she lowered them by rope through the window, because her house was inside the city's wall and in the wall she did dwell."* Rashi quotes Chazal who share with us the significance of this verse. Rachav said, "Let the lowering of the spies through this window and rope atone for all my involvement through this very same window with adulterers." In essence Rachav asked Hashem to forgive her for her past forty years of adulterous behavior and promiscuity. She said, "Let this heroic act of rescue atone for all of those years of immorality." Chazal's hidden message requires much explanation and development. True that Rachav performed a great deed, but why should it serve as an atonement for adultery and immorality? Is there some linkage between rescue and immorality? Can one act atone for forty years of promiscuity?

If we consider the far-reaching effects of Rachav's act, we will come to understand its impact on her previous life. As we have seen, Rachav informed the spies of the petrified state of the Canaanites and that, in effect, the war was won before it started. This inside information and encouragement guaranteed the deliverance of the entire land into the hands of the Jewish nation. Along with this would come the total annihilation of all those who would attempt, in any way, to remain in the land. However, if she held the spies hostage and did not allow their return, heightened levels of concern and confusion would develop amongst the Jewish people. Their faith would be shattered, which could conceivably affect their miraculous entry and cause devastating results. If she were to follow this course, in fact, many of her beloved acquaintances could be spared.

In essence, Rachav realized that the success of the spies' mission would ultimately lead to the termination of all her fond relationships over the past forty years. Yet she willingly played a lead role in this operation, knowing at every moment that she was turning on every person she so fondly knew. Since Hashem willed it so, she accepted it and exchanged her many years of intimacy and sin for a noble act of deliverance. With this she clearly demonstrated her absolute detachment from her previous life and her readiness to accept Hashem's will unconditionally.

In conclusion, as Rachav lowered the spies with this rope she remembered all the enjoyable moments this rope brought her in the past. And now, with this very same rope she handed over all

her acquaintances - her past forty years of life, into the hands of the Jewish people. "With this rope she had sinned and with this same rope, may she be atoned!"

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