

CHAPTER 2, VERSES 16-18

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel

(2, 16)

And she said to them, "Go to the mountain to avoid encountering the search party; hide there for three days until they return and then go on your own way." Rachav's advice for a three day wait reflects inner knowledge about the search party. Indeed Rashi quotes our Chazal who explain that Rachav possessed in this matter a degree of Divine insight. She sensed that the search would take three days and relayed this information with full confidence to the spies.

When reflecting upon this, we realize the unbelievable spiritual heights one can attain. With sincerity and conviction one can rise from total immorality to perfect spirituality. We are overtaken by the thought that as recently as the beginning of the year Rachav had led a life divorced from any moral code or values. And now, but a few months later, she had climbed to the apex of spirituality, experiencing a level of Divine perception and insight. Apparently, Rachav's clarity of vision was so profound that after discovering the truth, the sky was her limit.

But another intriguing thought comes to mind when reviewing this experience. We vividly remember that Rachav had completed her conversion process on this very same day! Today she took her first steps in Judaism and already merited to rescue the spies and even view life through Divine perception. This pattern follows a precedent set by another prominent convert, Bisya, the daughter of Pharaoh. On the day of her conversion she, like Rachav, engaged in an heroic rescue act and retrieved Moshe from the water. And on that very same day, she merited to observe the Divine presence of Hashem which accompanied Moshe in his basket. (see Rashi to Shemos 2:6) These revelations served as powerful assurance to Rachav and Bisya and demonstrated the extent of Hashem's appreciation of their remarkable first steps into Judaism.

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And the men said to her, "We are released from this oath which you imposed upon us." Malbim explains that their first oath was taken under duress. The spies were in Rachav's custody and at her mercy which obviously allowed for consent to any request she made. However, now however after being released, the spies could seriously consider what was feasible to be accomplished on her accord.

This observation is very helpful to us in understanding some of the subtleties of their counter - proposal. Although at face value it appears to be a carbon copy of Rachav's previous demand, a more careful analysis reveals its difference in nature.

(2, 18)

"Behold we are entering the land. Tie the line of this scarlet thread in the window through which you lowered us. And gather to you into the house your father, mother, brother, and all your father's household." As we compare their commitment with Rachav's previous agreement, we notice that the sisters' rescue was omitted from the listing. However, we discover in its place an unprecedented commitment to save Rachav's entire household. In addition we are puzzled by the redundant wording, *"Gather them to you into the house"* rather than merely stating bring them home.

The lesson gleaned from this is that, in actuality, the spies were not prepared to spare a Canaanite family. The Torah commands us about them, *"Do not preserve a soul of them"* (Devorim 20:16). The spies fully realized that they were not at liberty to compromise this commandment. However, Radak points out that this prohibition applied only after the complete entry of the Jewish people into Eretz Yisroel (see commentary to 6:25). If by some means a change in status would occur prior to the Jewish nation's entry, Rachav's family could be preserved. The spies therefore responded to Rachav with the following understanding and condition. Knowing her spiritual potential and sincere commitment to Judaism, Rachav's family could be convinced to convert along with Rachav. This change of status, if preceding the Jewish entry, would allow the family to exist and even be accepted into the inner circles of the Jewish people. The spies were prepared to rescue Rachav's family, but only on the condition that they were sincerely converting to Judaism.

It should be noted that although this condition could apply to Rachav's parents and brother, it was doubtful if it would hold true for her married sisters. They were obviously under the influence of their husbands and could not easily be trusted in their commitment. However, any and all household members who sincerely shared Rachav's profound feelings and approach towards Judaism would certainly be accepted and welcomed.

This explains the spies' specific intent when using the terminology, *"Gather to you."* By this they sought to limit their rescue efforts to those who identified with her beliefs and joined her in her ideology. In essence, if they committed themselves to conversion prior to the Jewish entry, they would be spared. For this reason, the sisters were cautiously omitted yet; conversely, all sincere household members were included. Through this binding condition of conversion, anyone who truly identified with Rachav's ideology deserved to share in her experience and would be warmly welcomed into the Jewish faith. And as we've learned in previous lessons, many of her members did follow her noble example thereby meriting to marry the most prominent leaders of our people.

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