

## CHAPTER 4, VERSES 8-10

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel

### (4, 8)

*"And the Jewish people did as Yehoshua commanded, and they lifted twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan in accordance to what Hashem said to Yehoshua which corresponded to the number of Jewish tribes. And they brought them to the inn and placed them there."*

If we study this passage we will notice that the entire discussion regarding the stones is their placement in the inn. No monument or erection is mentioned, rather merely stationing them there. In fact if we study Hashem's original instructions to Yehoshua (see verse 3) we will discover these exact words, *"And you shall place them down in the inn where you shall lodge tonight."* Apparently, the message of these stones was self-evident with no monument necessary. Conceivably, the miracle itself would remain well known and required no commemoration. However, the crucial role the holy ark played in the miracle could in time be forgotten. Therefore, these particular stones were chosen, those taken from under the stance of the Kohanim who carried the ark. As we will see in the upcoming passages, the mere presence of these stones outside of the Jordan told the entire story. (see Malbim ad loc.)

### (4, 9)

*"And Yehoshua erected twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan under the stance of the Kohanim who carried the ark of the covenant. And the stones remained there until today."* The erection of these stones in the midst of the Jordan deserves serious reflection. What purpose could they serve covered by water at the bottom of the Jordan? Certainly, they could not serve as a monument without being displayed for all to see. In addition is not a monument soon to be erected in Gilgal for this purpose?

The appreciation of these stones can be understood in the following context. The Talmud in Tractate Brachos 54a teaches us that when one observes the site where a major miracle occurred for the Jewish people, he should express gratitude to Hashem on their behalf. He should recite the blessing, *"Blessed are you who performed miracles for our parents at this site."* The Talmud continues with a listing of these significant sites and includes amongst them the crossing of the Jordan.

Apparently, the lesson of the Jordan extends far beyond its time and is meant to serve for all generations. Although the major lesson of Hashem's involvement was, for the most part, limited to times of war and conquest, an additional lesson remains for all times. Namely, that Eretz Yisroel and

Torah observance go hand in hand. This concept is best expressed by the renowned poet Rabbi Yehuda Halevi who pronounced, "Eretz Yisroel without Torah is likened to a body without a soul." Torah and Eretz Yisroel are in fact inseparable from each other. The Torah repeatedly states that the merit of inheriting Eretz Yisroel is Torah observance. In fact the purpose of living in Eretz Yisroel is to facilitate the furtherance of Torah practices. This is because living in Eretz Yisroel provides the special opportunity of a unique relationship with Hashem. This, in turn, leads to a heightened sensitivity towards His will and its fulfillment thereafter.

With the above understanding we gain appreciation for the landmark placed on the bottom of the Jordan. When one wishes to track the history of the Jewish nation he will undoubtedly follow their path of entry to the land beginning from the Jordan. After determining the proximity of the nation's first steps he will discover twelve hidden stones at the bottom of the Jordan. As we have learned, these mark the exact site upon which the Kohanim - carriers of the ark stood. This visual experience will reinforce the major role Torah observance plays in the overall scheme of things. It was the merit of Torah which allowed the Jewish people entry to the land and it is in this merit that the Jewish people continue to exit there. Yehoshua marked the miracle specifically at that very site to convey to all generations the significance Torah did and will play in occupying the land. Although the stones do remain at the bottom of the Jordan, if one searches for them, he will discover them and hear their message. They tell the true story of the Jewish people and the Holy Land; one of Torah observance and total commitment to Hashem.

#### **(4, 10)**

*"And the Kohanim - ark carriers - were standing in the midst of the Jordan until the completion of all that Hashem commanded Yehoshua to tell the people which encompassed all that Moshe commanded Yehoshua. And the people hurried and crossed."* It is intriguing to note that the actual content of Yehoshua's discussion is totally omitted from the text. Apparently, this discussion was intentionally concealed to remain somewhat mysterious. However, our Rabbis do deduce its hidden message through careful analysis of the detailed phraseology in the passage.

Rashi, (ad loc.) in defining the awkward wordy insert of Moshe's commanding Yehoshua, cites Chazal who direct us to a discussion between Hashem and Moshe in Sefer Bamidbar (see Bamidbar 33: 51-55). Therein the Torah states, *"Say to the Jewish people, 'For you are crossing the Jordan into the land of Canaan, and you shall drive out from your presence all the inhabitants of the land and destroy their places of worship... And if you do not achieve this then those whom you permit to remain will be staves in your eyes and thorns around your sides.'"* (Bamidbar 33: 51, 52, 55)

Our Rabbis expound upon the above passages of Bamidbar and explain that they were intended to be delivered as a binding condition for the Jewish nation's entry to Eretz Yisroel. Therefore, Yehoshua, who would lead the Jewish people, was commanded to present the following agreement. He said, "If you accept to remove all pagan influences from the land you will be worthy

and capable of inheriting it and will cross in safety. But if you don't accept this condition, the Jordan waters will return to their place and sweep you away." In essence, the Jewish people were told at the Jordan's crossing that their existence in the land of Israel was interdependent upon their driving away all foreign yet native influences from the land.

This condition, as understood by our Rabbis, was presented to the Jewish people during the actual crossing of the Jordan. This then is the message that the Scriptures allude to; the binding condition which Moshe commanded Yehoshua to deliver at the crossing. However, the reality is that the Jewish people did not fulfill their side of the commitment in its entirety. Many of the Jewish tribes permitted small pockets of pagan natives to remain in their land which ultimately led to the downfall of the Jewish nation. Eventually, the Jewish people succumbed to foreign influences and engaged themselves in the idolatrous practices of the land which resulted in the forfeiting of Eretz Yisroel.

We now appreciate the Scriptures' secretive nature of this message. In retrospect, we realize that the message was not fully appreciated. When push came to shove, it was truly difficult to conquer all the hidden pockets of pagan tribes and the task was never completed. The open mention of this condition at the outset would cast serious blame on the Jewish people. After all, the entire miracle of the Jordan transpired solely because of their commitment to upholding their side of the agreement. Although it did not manifest itself in perfect fulfillment, their sincerity at the outset was truly there. Therefore, the Scriptures, in protection of the glory of the Jewish people intentionally concealed the nature of the discussion. There was sincerity and true commitment on their part which did not warrant their being blamed now for their lack of fulfillment sometime in the future.

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