

## CHAPTER 5, VERSES 12 - 14

*by Rabbi Dovid Siegel*

### **(5, 12)**

"And the manna ceased the next day once they ate from the produce of the land and the Jewish people no longer had manna and ate from the Canaanite grain that year." Our Sages explain (see Mesichta Kiddushin 37a) that the Torah prohibits partaking of the newly grown grain until the Omer is offered on the second day of Passover. Consequently, the Jewish people could not eat from the produce of Canaan - all newly grown - until after that day. Now that they offered the Omer, ordinary food became accessible to them and the miraculous manna experience ended. Rashi reflects upon the wordy structure of our verse and explains that the Jewish people actually preferred manna over ordinary physical sustenance. They were accustomed to their spiritual experience and wished it to continue. The reality was; however, that it could not. Now that ordinary food was available, they had to return to normal life. The Scriptures therefore reveal that the Jewish people reluctantly ate Canaanite grain now that manna was no longer available.

When reflecting upon this, we realize the incredible spiritual level of the Jewish people at that time. Many years ago the Jewish people complained about the manna and its demands upon them. Such spirituality came with tremendous responsibility and demanded a high level of commitment. Therefore, in the early stages of their manna experience (see Bamidbar 11:6) the Jewish people opted against manna and requested a more physical sustenance, one without imposing standards of faith. A one time miracle is wonderful, but a lifetime of miracles requires constant merit and perfection. This appeared from the outset too difficult to expect of them.

But after forty years of spirituality, the Jewish people didn't wish it any other way. What could be better than eating straight from your father's hand? If you truly appreciate him, the more time spent with him the better. At this point in their relationship, the Jewish people wished it could continue forever. Alas, with great reluctance they faced reality and accepted that it was time to enter the reduced atmosphere of nature and its physical properties. From this point forward their interaction with Hashem would be limited to reciting blessings to Him recognizing that He is their Ultimate Source of sustenance. Although His direct involvement would no longer be seen, they pledged to maintain full recognition that it was He and only He who provided all of their needs.

### **(5, 13)**

"And it was when Yehoshua was in Yericho he lifted his eyes and saw a man standing opposite him

with sword drawn in hand. And Yehoshua approached him and said, 'Are you for us or our enemy?'" Radak explains that the Jewish people travelled to the outskirts of Yericho after recovering from their circumcision. They were forging towards Yericho, their first city of conquest, when a "man" appeared. Yehoshua quickly discovered that this "man" was actually an angel sent to direct them in their conquest.

It is interesting to note the text's omission of the travel itself. The Scriptures merely state that Yehoshua was near Yericho without a hint that he left Gilgal and travelled to Yericho. One would think that these first steps towards conquest were historic and deserve a spotlight. Why then were they totally omitted?

A good understanding of the purpose and message of this angel could alleviate our concern and put things into perspective.

### **(5, 14)**

*"And the angel responded, 'No, for I am Hashem's officer and have come now.' And Yehoshua fell on his face to the ground and prostrated himself and said, 'What does My Master say to His servant?'"*

Rashi explains that the basic mission of the angel was to assist in the conquest because of the impossibility of penetrating the wall of Yericho. However, the wording of the angel is perplexing. What did he mean when he said, *"I have come now"* (see Rashi ad loc. for one interpretation)?

Our Sages (in Mesichta Megilla 3a) explain this message in a unique manner. They explain that the angel was sent to rebuke the Jewish people for not immersing themselves in Torah study that night. Although they were preparing for war, night is not a time for war and the time could have been utilized more appropriately. This fault doesn't seem to be that serious, yet an angel was sent to rectify it. Apparently, it reflected a greater concern which demanded immediate attention.

The reality was that the war of conquest was fought in a miraculous manner. We will soon discover that Yericho was captured by encircling it and blowing shofar. Once the fortified walls came down, the entire city was open prey to the Jewish nation. With this miraculous approach, little strategy was required to conquer the city. Consequently, the eve of the conquest should have been spent in Torah study, the greatest Jewish merit existing. The angel reprimanded them by his very presence which reflected Hashem's total involvement in the war. He said, *"I have come now"* challenging their entire approach to this war. He admonished them that there was no need for anxiety and apprehension because Hashem was fighting the war. They should engage in their usual Torah study like any other night; their best strategy for this war.

We now understand the Scriptures omission of this advance to Yericho. In truth their entire approach was incorrect and mentioning the advance would not bring much credit to them. Their anxiety and overwhelming concern was inappropriate and actually required an angel to correct it.

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