

CHAPTER 7, VERSES 13-14

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel

(7:13)

"Rise and prepare the people and say to them, 'Prepare for tomorrow because so says Hashem of Israel, 'A ban is in your midst, Israel, you will not be able to rise before your enemies until you remove the banned items from your midst.'"

The Hebrew word used here for preparation is "kadeish" which literally means "sanctity" and "designation." This word is also used when describing the Jewish people's preparation before crossing the Jordan. Apparently, something of major significance was soon to transpire and the people were instructed to prepare themselves accordingly. It seems that the removal of the banned items was not limited to its physical process act but included a spiritual cleansing from their sinful involvement in this atrocity. In order to achieve this, Hashem instructed them to prepare themselves for a spiritual experience of purity and clarity.

(7:14)

"In the morning you shall draw near in tribe division and the tribe Hashem captures shall near in family division and the family Hashem captures shall near in familiar subdivision and finally as individuals."

This extended process was used to determine the criminal who violated the ban. Radak enlightens us on this selection process and explains that the entire nation passed before Hashem's Holy Ark which captured the guilty parties and momentarily paralyzed them. After selecting the guilty tribe, the process was repeated until the perpetrator was discovered. It can be understood that this awesome experience served as a spiritual cleansing for the Jewish people. Standing before Hashem's presence helped them sense Hashem's intense scrutiny on their actions and attitudes. This yielded a perfect focus on their inadequacies and allowed them to realize their total dependence upon Him. In addition to this general wake up call, they observed a vivid demonstration of Hashem's control over advance and movement in the land. These crucial lessons enabled the Jewish people to correct their error and realign themselves with the absolute truth.

We previously explained that Achan's violation of the ban reflected his sense of personal accomplishment in the war of conquest (see Yalkut Shimoni 18). We added that the Jewish people, in this regard, were remotely associated with this attitude through their air of confidence during the war of Ay. Hashem clarified their perspective and clearly demonstrated Who was behind all conquest. Passing before Hashem's Ark subjected every Jewish person to personal capture and

reminded him of his misconception about the Jewish people's general conquest of the nations. But the paralysis of the guilty tribe and ultimately of Achan displayed the True Source of all conquest and possession. The unequivocal message was that no movement takes place in His land without His consent and involvement and that all conquest is truly owed to Him. Hashem responded to Achan's arrogant feeling of personal credit in conquest by capturing Achan himself; not permitting him movement without Hashem's consent.

Radak quotes our sages who offers second explanation to the process. They explain that Yehoshua asked Hashem to reveal to him the sinner's identity, but Hashem responded, *"Am I an informer? Go and draw lots to determine the guilty party."* We learn from this an important lesson regarding the laws of detrimental speech. The issue at hand was the safety and security of the Jewish people and the subject discussed was a criminal who endangered the lives of the entire Jewish nation. In addition, the purpose of identifying him was to punish him for his serious offense. Yet, Hashem responded to all of this and stated that He would not provide the necessary information. Chafetz Chaim deduces from this an halachic principle that one must exhaust all alternative routes before he is permitted to share crucial information. Hashem's rationale was that since the information could be obtained through drawing lots, He would not inform on Achan.

It is worthwhile to reflect upon this lesson taught to us specifically at this juncture. First, since Yehoshua possessed "Ruach HaKodesh" - Heavenly perception - why didn't he activate his inner sense and reveal the sinner? Second, how definite was this alternate route of drawing lots? A process of this nature is certainly subject to skepticism and indeed, as our Sages reveal, this is precisely what occurred. Achan taunted Yehoshua and attacked his method of determination claiming that if Yehoshua had been part of the final lot, he would also have been captured. Why didn't Hashem simply reveal the truth and avoid all of the complication and skepticism?

We can approach this matter in the following way. Our Sages note that this was not Achan's first violation of a ban; rather, it his fourth. However, Hashem never responded to this crime until the Jewish people crossed the Jordan and entered a treaty of brotherhood. After that point they were held personally responsible for the actions of one another and this infraction was the first to receive a response. At this point the Jewish people learned the full extent of their collective responsibility and were undoubtedly frightened by its consequences. For one, this experience definitely heightened their sensitivity regarding the actions of others and created a pressing need to remove all evil and evil doers from their midst. This could obviously lead to many inappropriate leniencies in the laws of informing on others. In addition, Hashem's piercing response could lead to resentment towards collective responsibility and foster a lack of unity amongst the Jewish people.

Now was time for Hashem to display His love and concern for His people. Indeed, our Sages comment on Hashem's introductory statement, *"Israel has sinned"* and note that Hashem refers to His people in their elevated status of Yisroel rather than Yaakov or merely referring to them as the people. They explain this to indicate, *"Although they have sinned, they remain Yisroel!"* Hashem's

boundless love for His people never weakens, even during their sinful moments. Along this line, Hashem demonstrated His love for Achan in a tangible way. Although Achan deserved to be punished for his atrocious behavior once and for all, Hashem wouldn't allow Himself to inform on His precious son. The Jewish people would be forced to resort to other less conclusive methods. Hashem's lesson taught through His personal "conduct" undoubtedly made an indelible impression on His people. If this is how Hashem relates to a sinner of this magnitude, how much more should they respect and cherish one another following in the ways of their true Father Above.

The lesson from this is powerful. One should study the Chafetz Chaim's monumental work on the laws of proper speech. He reminds us countless times that the Jewish people's ultimate redemption is totally dependent upon our rectifying this problem. May we merit to see the mastery of perfect appropriate speech soon in our days.

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