GOING UP

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

However, the men that went up with him said, "We are not able to fight the people; they are stronger than us!" (Bamidbar 13:31)

One of the biggest fiascos of all of history remains to be the episode of the Spies. Had it not occurred nothing else ever would have gone wrong, not then, not now, not ever. Moshe Rabbeinu would have been Moshiach, history would have come to an end, and evil would have been banished from Creation. How could they have erred so grievously when so much was at stake?

Obviously they didn't know. Unless they were masochists who welcomed suffering, they had to have believed that rejecting *Eretz Yisroel* could work. They had to have thought that it was a viable option to stay in the desert, and that God would agree to their decision if there was a national consensus. This is why they were so surprised when God had the exact opposite reaction. I've dealt with this issue in previous years.

Instead, I want to bring up a different discussion based upon a disagreement between Rashi and Tosfos regarding the following statement of the Talmud:

> During the 40 years the Jewish people were in the wilderness the north wind did not blow upon them. What was the reason? If you want I can say, because they were under Divine displeasure . . . (*Yevamos* 72a)

Why did this make a difference? Because the north wind heals wounds, and without this wind it was dangerous to perform *Bris Milah*. Consequently, the Jewish people did not perform the all important *mitzvah* of *Bris* the entire time they wandered in the desert. It is one of the first things they did after entering *Eretz Yisroel* just before bringing a Pesach Offering. An uncircumcised male must not eat from the *Korban Pesach*.

This part everyone agrees to. The disagreement is over what it was that angered God and denied them access to the healing power of the north wind, and therefore *Bris Milah* and *Korban Pesach*. According to Rashi, it was the sin of the golden calf. According to Tosfos it was a different sin altogether.

After all, as Tosfos points out, God forgave the Jewish people for the sin of the calf. The sin that He did not forgive them for during the 40 years in the desert was the sin of the Spies. In fact, the Jewish people were in excommunication during that time, so if any sin caused the north wind to stop

blowing their way, it was this sin.

This makes sense on one level. On the other hand, why should the sin of the Spies take away the *mitzvah* of *Milah*? What is the connection between the two?

The connection has to do with *Eretz Yisroel* itself. The Zohar says:

> Come and see: For 400 years, the minister of the children of Yishmael stood and begged before God. He said to Him, "Whoever is circumcised has a portion in Your Name."
>
> He answered him, "It is so."
>
> He said to Him, "Yishmael is circumcised. Why does he not have a portion in You like Yitzchak?"
>
> He told him, "One was circumcised properly and according to the full requirements, while the other was not. Furthermore, one cleaves to Me as is specified on the eighth day, while the others are distanced from me for many days [being circumcised only at age 13]."
>
> He said to Him, "But still, since he is circumcised, should he not have a good reward for this?"
>
> Woe is to the time that Yishmael was born into the world and was circumcised. What did God do [to appease Yishamel]? He distanced the children of Yishmael from supernal cleaving and gave them [only] a portion below in the Holy Land on account of their circumcision. In the future, the children of Yishmael are destined to rule over the Holy Land for a long time while it is empty, like their circumcision which is empty and imperfect. They will prevent the Children of Israel from returning to their place until the reward for the merit of the children of Yishmael is complete. (*Zohar, Shemos* 32a)

If performing *Bris Milah* is the merit to control *Eretz Yisroel,* then rejection of the Land means losing the right to perform *Bris Milah*. Yishmael may not have performed a complete *Bris Milah,* lacking the *mitzvah* of *priyah*, but he did enough of it to warrant having control over the Land for 1300 years. It works out to be 100 years for each year of age he was when he performed *Bris*.

The question is, what is special about *Bris Milah* that it is so strongly associated with *Eretz Yisroel?* The answer becomes apparent after better understanding *Bris Milah* and *Eretz Yisroel.*

Why did God make Avraham leave home and move to *Eretz Yisroel?* Why couldn't He just set Avraham up in Charan and be his God there? What is so special about *Eretz Yisroel* that the Torahs says:

> *I am God your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be a God to you.* (*Vayikra* 25:38)

and the Talmud says:

> A person should rather live in *Eretz Yisroel*, even in a city where the majority of inhabitants are

> gentile, than outside the Land, even if the majority of the city's inhabitants are Jewish. All those who dwell in *Eretz Yisroel* are like those who have a God, and all those who dwell outside the Land are like those without a God. (*Kesuvos* 110b)

After all, this could be true only because God already gave the Jewish people the Land. The fact that God designated *Eretz Canaan* to be the inheritance of the Jewish people itself may be what gives it importance. But why did God designate the Land in the first place?

This can be explained by way of analogy.

Imagine a person who decides he wants to have an office 50 floors above ground level. He loves the view from such a height and has decided that his work will be more inspired with such an inspiring view.

To have such an office he has to build it on top of 49 other levels. In other words, his dream office will be on the top of a skyscraper, and even though his floor will be the last to be built it was the first to be planned. Everything else that will be built from the ground up to the fiftieth floor will be only to reach his level.

Though *Eretz Yisroel* is physically attached to the same earth as the rest of the nations of the world, attached to a continent made up of many other countries it is not so, spiritually. This is because even though the temporal world exists on one physical plane, the spiritual world exists on five, from the bottom up: *Asiyah, Yetzirah, Beriyah, Atzilus,* and *Adam Kadmon*. Translated they are: Action, Formation, Creation, Emanations, and First Man, names that mean very little without explanation.

The important point is that there are different levels of spiritual reality. Just as two people can sit together and yet be on very different spiritual levels, so can lands adjoin one another and yet exist on very different spiritual planes. *Eretz Yisroel* is on the level of *Yetzirah*, and the rest of the lands are only on the level of *Asiyah,* on a different spiritual plane altogether.

Since this is the case, spiritual potential is much greater in *Eretz Yisroel*. To live there requires a higher level of soul, and when a person makes *aliyah*, he gets one. When he moves to the Diaspora, he loses it. When God told Avraham to "go for himself," He meant for the sake of his true self, his higher level of soul, which he could not receive until he lived in land that supported it.

This is why God made living in *Eretz Yisroel* the condition for Him to be God of the Jewish people. You can't pick up the Divine "signal" the same way on the level of *Asiyah* that you can on the level of *Yetzirah*. God took us out of Egypt means that He took us out of the level of *Asiyah,* to bring us to the level of *Yetzirah* so that we can relate to Him as God.

This is also the reason for the Talmud's statement. Whatever a Jewish community can give you in the Diaspora it can't elevate a person to the level of *Yetzirah*, not like living in *Eretz Yisroel* does. This is true even if the community in *Eretz Yisroel* is predominantly gentile, because they cannot reduce the spiritual state of the Holy Land.

This brings us to the *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah*. Ostensibly the *mitzvah* of *Bris* is more symbolic than anything else, meaning that performing it proves our loyalty to God and our commitment to use even our most base instincts in a holy manner. Other than the removal of some skin, does it really change the person? Adults who have had *Bris* done did not seem to change dramatically after the act.

It may not change the person, but it does change the level of reality on which they live. It certainly changes his spiritual potential, which might not be apparent at first but which becomes more obvious over time. A person who receives a deposit of money in his bank account does not change much because of the fact. It is only once he starts to spend it that it becomes clear he is richer.

Likewise, *Bris Milah* enriches a person spiritually. It won't be apparent at first, but once he starts to "spend" his spiritual potential, it will become clear that he is spiritually richer. Though this may not be clear when a baby has *Bris Milah* at the age of eight days old, it will be clearer to someone who receive *Bris* as an adult.

The same is true about Shabbos as well. When a person accepts Shabbos, spiritually as well as physically, he does not simply experience a holier day. Rather, he or she who keeps Shabbos ascends from the level of *Asiyah* to the level of *Yetzirah*. We don't work on Shabbos because on the level of *Yetzirah*, the level of *Gan Aiden*, work of such a nature is not necessary. It is called *"Chillul Shabbos"* because it is the performance of work suited for *Asiyah* on the level of *Yetzirah*.

The same is true about *Eretz Yisroel*. Ideally, according to the Talmud, one is not supposed to have to perform physical labor to survive in *Eretz Yisroel*. As the second paragraph of the *"Shema"* says, God makes the Land miraculously produce food when the Jewish people are loyal to Torah and *mitzvos*. Like Adam HaRishon in the Garden of Eden, "working" and "guarding" the Land means learning Torah and keeping the *mitzvos*.

When the Jewish people opted to remain in the desert, they chose the level of *Asiyah* over the level of *Yetzirah*. They accepted to live with a lesser level of spiritual potential, the exact opposite of what *Bris Milah* teaches us to do. Rejecting *Eretz Yisroel* was the same as rejecting *Bris*, and as a result they lost the right to perform it.

Even though we have continued to perform *Bris Milah* ever since the Jews entered the Land in Yehoshua's time, it does not mean that rejecting the Land does not have a similar effect. There have been times when *Bris Milah* has been banned, and today there are countries that want to forbid it until a person is old enough to decide on his own if he wants it performed. This is more of a message from Heaven than it is from those against *Bris*.

Making *aliyah* may be difficult. Rejecting the Land, however, makes life even more difficult. The Intifadah began for a reason, and I don't mean the one the Arab's claim. World pressure on Israel to surrender land is increasing, and that means something, not as far as the world is concerned but as far as Heaven is concerned.

It takes a special person to live in the Diaspora as if he is really in *Eretz Yisroel,* and that usually requires being there for all the right reasons. The Spies were sure they had them, and ended up being dead wrong. What about our generation?

Text

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