

ONLY THE SHADOW KNOWS

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

In last week's Parsha the tribes of Reuven and Gad asked permission to settle in the trans-Jordan lands of Sichon and Og. Moshe acquiesced on condition that they become the point guard in the campaign to occupy the Promised Land. Additionally, Moshe insisted that ½ of the tribe of Menashe join them in settling the trans-Jordan lands.

In last week's Rabbi's Notebook I explained why Moshe insisted that the tribe of Menashe join the venture; however, I did not explain what was driving Gad and Reuven to make the request. What were their real motives for wanting to live apart from the rest of the Jewish people? What were their real motives for wanting to be further from Jerusalem and the Bais Hamikdash (holy temple)? What were their real motives for wanting to live closer to the other nations? What were their real motives for wanting to be the first line of defense protecting Israel's eastern border?

It is true that they had large cattle holdings and the trans-Jordan lands would provide ample pasture for their herds; however, that was the rationalization not the real motive. What were their real motives?

Rav Dessler explained that free willed beings must always battle the bias they have in favor of things physical and desired. No matter how spiritually evolved a person might be, he or she will still be physically bound to their existence. From birth to death the physical connection is a reality that cannot be denied. It can be controlled and sublimated; it can be modified and restricted; it can be avoided and subjugated; however, it can never be eradicated. Only death can sever the innate bond between the body and soul, the physical and the spiritual. Even the greatest Tzadik (righteous individual) will retain what Rav Dessler calls "the shadow" of his physicality. That shadow is a reality that must be never be ignored or taken for granted.

What "shadow" possessed the tribes of Reuven and Gad motivating their request to settle the lands of Sichon and Og? Furthermore, in what way did their commitment to lead the Jewish forces into battle offset Moshe's concerns for their spiritual and physical safety?

Gad was a tribe of warriors and Reuven was a tribe that should have been kings.

Gad was blessed by Yakov that they would lead the Jewish people in the campaign to capture the Promised Land and that all their men would return home safely. (Ber. Rashi 49:19) Reuven was the first-born of Yakov who should have been king but wasn't. Yakov criticized his impetuosity while Moshe blessed his acceptance. For a variety of reasons it became clear that Reuven was not the

best qualified to be king; instead, Yehuda and Yoseph each rose to that position. Yehuda (starting with King David) eventually became king of Israel forging the national government and building the Bais Hamikdash. Yoseph, on the other hand, was king when interfacing with the non-Jewish world in the environment of the non-Jewish world for the benefit and survival of the nation. Rather than resent Yoseph for his dreams of royalty or Yehuda for his divinely appointed destiny, Reuven accepted that he would merely be "numbered among the Jewish people." (Divarim 33:6)

I would like to suggest that the otherwise intended leadership of Reuven and the gifted fighting ability of Gad were the "shadowed motives" for their request to occupy the captured lands of Sichon and Og.

Gad was a tribe of gifted warriors; disciplined, courageous, able, and willing; however, more so than all those essential qualities, they were one of the tribes of the Bnai Yisroel. Gad, like all his brothers and the tribes they birthed, were first and foremost servants of G-d. They believed in His primacy and the absolute control He maintained over the world.

In Uz Yashir (Song at the Sea) we sing, "G-d is the Man of War?" Everyone is familiar with the adage, "There are no atheists in fox-holes." In many regards, that may be among the truest statements ever made. Soldiers, old and young alike, have told me that in war everyone knows that G-d walks the battlefield. So many near misses and "almosts" occur that it is impossible to explain why this one died and that one lived. The finger of G-d points and the hand of G-d protects; nevertheless, the best armies must still train their men to produce the finest warriors.

Training is the effort we put forth within the context of our absolute faith and dependency on the "Man of War." Therein lays the "shadow" of Gad's secret motivation. It is very difficult to work at becoming the best and not take credit for the outcome. "My strength and the power of my efforts accomplished all this!" Gad's challenge was to see beyond the successes of war and acknowledge that it was all done by the grace of G-d.

The lands of Og and Sichon were symbolic as well as practical, especially the lands of Og. Rashi explained in last week's Parsha and in Bereishis that Og was a survivor of the Mabul (Great Flood). Og was 1000 plus years old and was prediluvian. He was the sole survivor of the Rephaim, an ancient pre-Mabul race of giants, and most likely the oldest living human. Og thought of himself as invincible, all-powerful, and immortal. In many regards he was the ultimate practitioner of "My strength and the power of my efforts accomplished all this!" Having witnessed and survived the destruction of the world, the war between the five and four kings, and countless other conflicts, Og believed he would live forever. Witness to the evolution and demise of innumerable religions and lifestyles, he was unpleasantly surprised to see the return of monotheism and the Jewish nation. Until they arrived at the borders of his land he believed that Judaism would also go the way of the world ? rise, fall, and if remembered as a historical footnote. Instead, he had to contend with it being alive and well and knocking at his front door!

The death of Og by the hands of Moshe Rabbeinu established in the minds of all, including the Jews, that Hashem was truly "the Man Of War." By all natural accounts Og should have killed Moshe; instead, like Dovid and Goliath, Og was destroyed and the primacy of Hashem was established.

In the minds of Gad, occupying the lands of Og had a very special meaning. As they built their homes and farms, everyone would know that the demise of Og represented the death of his philosophy. However, in the depths of their heart, the tribe of Gad was actually attracted to Og's way of thinking. It was that slight shadow of self-assurance and righteous determination that Moshe suspected, questioned, and then challenged.

Reuven's shadowed motivation was different. As the one who did not become King, Reuven exhibited laudable restraint and acceptance. He did not complain and he did not appear resentful; yet, in the depths of his heart he mourned the loss of his kingship. Upon arriving at the borders of the Promised Land Reuven realized that he wanted to be different and apart from the rest of the nation. He wanted the chance to justify the order of his birth.

Please understand that it is not for us to determine motives for the deeds of our forefathers. The generation that occupied the Promised Land merited doing so because they were the most deserving. By comparison, our levels of Emunah (belief) and Bitachon (trust) are but the faintest shadow of the profundity and depth of their faith. Yet, every mortal must acknowledge his own shadow. I believe that Gad and Reuven had theirs as well.

At the end of this week's Parsha, (3:16-22) Moshe sums up his succinct history of the desert years by charging Yehoshua to remember that it was G-d Who had vanquished the great kings Sichon and Og. Recounting the deal he had made with the two tribes of Reuven and Gad, Moshe reminded the nation that all of them would be confronted by the same shadowed challenge as had Reuven and Gad. Only by assuming the point position and leading the army into battle would Gad and Reuven see the folly of their true motives. Forced into the most dangerous and vulnerable position in each battle the great warriors of Gad and the determined leaders of Reuven would have to face their own shadows. To whom would they attribute the promised victories? Would they allow the shadow of self-congratulations and arrogance to mar the proof of G-d's mastery or would they dispel all shadows as they went to battle singing the praises of Hashem and His absolute mastery over all things?

(3:22) "You shall not fear them! G-d shall wage war for you!"

Laws of Erev Tisha B-Av & Tisha B'Av

This year, Erev Tisha B-Av is Monday, July 26. Erev Tisha B'Av is no different than the rest of the Nine Days except in regard to preparing for the fast and the Seudas Hamafsekes (the dividing meal).

1. The accepted custom is to eat a large meal after Mincha in preparation for the fast. It is different from Erev Yom Kippur when there is a mitzvah to eat. On Erev Tisha B-Av there is no mitzvah to eat.

In fact the Halacha suggests that a person who is able to fast on Tisha B'Av without eating a lot on Erev Tisha B'Av should do so.

- 2.** After Mincha, before sunset, the Seudas Hamafsekes is eaten. This consists of a piece of bread, a cold hard-boiled egg, with the bread dipped in ashes. The meal is eaten while sitting on the floor, and three men should not sit together so that they avoid the need for making a Zimun. If three men do sit together they still do not make a Zimun. Regular shoes can be worn during this symbolic meal.
- 3.** After the Seudah Hamafsekes it is advisable to verbally say, "I do not accept the fast upon myself until sunset".
- 4.** Keep in mind that all the laws of Tisha B-Av take effect at sunset. Before sunset all eating and drinking must stop and leather shoes must be removed.
- 5.** Some Halachik authorities forbid learning Torah after midday on Erev Tisha B'Av, except for those topics permitted to be studied on Tisha B-Av; however, many others permit it.

Tisha B'Av

Tisha B'Av, like Yom Kippur, is a 24+ hour fast, with additional restrictions.

The following are prohibited: Eating, drinking, wearing leather shoes (referring to leather construction such as the soles or uppers, not leather strips or ornamentation), washing any part of the body, marital relations, and the use of moisturizing creams, lotions, or oils. Anti-perspirant and medicinal ointments for rashes and irritations are allowed.

The prohibition against bodily washing is directed toward pleasure, not necessity. However, on Tisha B'Av the Halachik criterion for necessity is actual dirt. Therefore, washing one's face first thing in the morning is categorized as pleasure, and is prohibited.

Netilas Yadayim is performed by washing your fingers up until the knuckles. Women do not go to Mikvah on Tisha B'Av night, and it is recommended that all preparations for going to the Mikvah Thursday night, be done on Wednesday, Erev Tisha B'Av.

The distinction between Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av is in the reason for the restrictions. On Yom Kippur, which is a serious but not a sad day, we project an elevated sense of sanctity and purpose that renders physical pleasure and sustenance irrelevant. On Tisha B'Av, which is both a serious and a mournful day, we project a sense of loss and mourning that renders physical concern as unimportant. Therefore, on Tisha B'Av we have the following additional customs that reflect our status as mourners:

- 1.** Until 1:00 p.m., we sit on the floor or a low stool (not higher than 12").
- 2.** Like an Avel (mourner), we should not greet each other the entire day of Tisha B'Av.
- 3.** It is forbidden to learn Torah all day except for those topics relating to the laws of mourning or the

destruction of the Bais Hamikdash.

4. One should not go to work on Tisha B'Av; however, if you feel that you must go to work, it is best do so after midday - 1:00 p.m. Tisha B'Av is not to be used as a day to catch up on housework or repairs.

5. Tallis and Tefillin are first worn at Mincha, and Tzitzit should be put on in the morning without a Bracha.

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