

SHOWING SPIRITUAL MATURITY AFTER 40 YEARS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Ki Savo

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 736, Your Aliyah: Must You Read Along? Good Shabbos!

Showing Spiritual Maturity After 40 Years

The parshios in Sefer Devarim represent the last days of the life of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe makes a very interesting statement at the end of Ki Savo: "But Hashem did not give you a heart to know, or eyes to see or ears to hear until this day." [Devarim 29:3]

The Talmud [Avodah Zarah 5b] derives from this pasuk [verse] the lesson that a disciple does not fully appreciate and integrate the teachings of his master until after 40 years. A certain maturity comes with age.

Many of us can think back to the teachers and Rabbis who we had in our youth. Maybe they did things in those years, which at the time, in did not seem to make any sense. As we have gotten older, often, we may say to ourselves, "I now understand what he was doing." This is an example of "A person does not fully understand his Rebbi until 40 years after the fact."

This is what happened in our parsha as well. The Jewish people were in the wilderness for forty years. Despite being unbelievable giants, that generation was a troublesome group of individuals. They questioned Moshe and the Almighty almost from the word "Go". It was not yet 7 days post the exodus when they felt they were all doomed at the Red Sea. We wonder how people who witnessed all the miracles of the plagues in Egypt can now panic that the Almighty would let them down one week later? This went on and on throughout all the incidents in the desert: We are going to starve; we are going to die of thirst, etc, etc.

Now, finally, after 40 years, after most of that generation had passed on, Moshe Rabbeinu finally makes the statement about the newly emergent generation: "Hashem did not give you a heart to know, or eyes to see or ears to hear UNTIL THIS DAY." With this idea in mind we can perhaps explain a very peculiar pasuk.

Moshe give a very brief synopsis of the highlights of their sojourn in the desert: "...your garment did

not wear out from on you, and your shoe did not wear out from on your foot. Bread you did not eat and wine or intoxicant you did not drink, so that you would know that I am Hashem, your G-d. Then you arrived at this place, and Sichon, king of Cheshbon and Og, king of Bashan, went out toward us to battle, and we smote them. We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reuvenite, the Gadite, and to half the tribe of the Manassite." [Devorim 29: 3-5].

If we were writing the highlights of this wondrous period of Jewish history, what would we include? Moshe Rabbeinu makes some very logical choices. He accounts for the fact that G-d miraculously fed and clothed the Jewish people during those 40 years. G-d miraculously protected them, defeating Sichon and Og when they came out to attack the Jewish people. We were successful in conquering their territories, thereby getting our first foot-hold in a land that we could call our own.

But then he mentions the detail of distributing the portion of land formerly belonging to Sichon and Og to the Tribes of Gad, Reuvain, and half of Menashe. This detail would not, most likely, make our list of highlights of the 40 years in the wilderness. The story takes up a small section of Parshas Massai, but we would not normally associate the event with the major highlights of the era. Moshe is certainly not giving a diary of every single event that occurred during those 40 years - just the highlights! And yet he felt compelled to mention the fact that the conquered land of Sichon and Og were divided up to Gad, Reuvain, and Menashe. Why is that in here?

The Shemen HaTov suggests an interesting answer. Moshe came to the nation towards the end of 40 years and told them that two tribes wanted to take their portions from the land that has already been conquered. "The rest of us will travel on to Eretz Yisrael and do battle with the 30 kings and the 7 nations. After we conquer them, the rest of the Tribes will get their portions of land."

Many people might have reacted as follows to such a proposal: "Wait a minute! We are not giving away anything yet! Let us first see what happens. What if we do not defeat the 30 kings and the 7 nations and we are not successful in conquering the land? That would leave us no other choice than to split the territories on the East Bank of the Jordan among all 12 tribes. Not so quick, Moshe Rabbeinu!"

However, the dramatic fact was that after 40 years, they finally "Got it". Now they were at a spiritual level such that when they were told that with G-d's Help they would defeat the 30 kings and the 7 nations and conquer their land, it was money in the bank! They believed it to the extent that they were ready to give away the already conquered land on the East Bank, knowing full well that the other land was "already theirs".

This was the difference between now and forty years earlier. Had Moshe Rabbeinu tried that with the previous generation and told them "give away this land now, you will get yours later" he would have been told "wait a minute!" They did not believe they were going to get their bread or their water. They certainly did not believe they would defeat mighty armies in battle!

It is to commemorate this development that Moshe comments: "But Hashem did not give you a

heart to know, or eyes to see or ears to hear until this day." Finally, after 40 years, you have true faith in the Almighty! Moshe proves this fact by citing their willingness to give up the already conquered Trans-Jordan to two and a half tribes, fully confident that they would soon be conquering the other part of Eretz Yisrael and getting their own share on the West Bank of the Jordan.

This is not just a historical footnote regarding some obscure incident in the wilderness. This marks a turning point in the spiritual maturity of the Jewish people. They now "spoke with their wallets", clearly demonstrating their Emunah [belief] in the promises of the Almighty.

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