

## 'When Hashem Expands your Boundaries'

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In this week's Parsha, Moshe is quite disturbed as he recalls the sin of the spies and the tragic punishment that came in its wake. It seems to Moshe, and to us, the readers, that the tribes of Reuven and Gad are repeating the same mantra that we've heard so many times in the past by Bnei Yisrael since leaving Egypt – We do not wish to enter the Land of Israel, 'Allow us to not cross over the Jordan River.'

This idea, of not wanting to enter the land, is a recurring event that has been with us from the moment Bnei Yisrael left Egypt and stood before Yam Suf, and up to this point in our Parasha when the nations is on the threshold of the promised land. Time and again, albeit in different wording and different circumstances, the people complain about leaving Egypt, and voice their feelings against entrance into the Land of Israel. What is interesting about the case of our Parasha is how it differs in outcome from all the other cases. In previous instances, where the people complained to Moshe, to Aaron or to Hashem and requested to return to Egypt or not enter the land there was always a severe punishment followed by Moshe praying for the people to be forgiven and then a return to the original course on the way to the land. In our case, the case of Reuven and Gad it seems that Moshe gives in. Moshe is at first upset, they then negotiate and at the end Reuven and Gad's request is fulfilled and their 'Nachala' remains outside the Land of Israel.

What happened? What was different about this request that made it less resentful than other similar statements? And finally- why, after all the years in the desert and the promises of a land flowing with milk and honey which was the purpose of the redemption, do Hashem and Moshe allow them to get what they want and not enter the promised land?

In Hassidic teachings the Land of Egypt symbolizes boundaries, restrictions, tight spaces, bondage and slavery. In many texts the word Mitzraim (Egypt) is interchanged with Maitzarim (boundaries), that we need to escape from or break out of into an open a free space. This teaching does not relate only to physical boundaries or restrictions but also or primarily to our consciousness.

In relation to the boundaries or borders of the Land of Israel we can also find many instances in the words of Midrashim and our sages that discuss future expansions of the land. An example of this can be found in Yalkut Shimoni that discusses a verse in the book of Zecharia that mentions the city of Damascus. The Midrash explains the passuk to mean that in the future the 'Land of Israel will expand its breadth and width to all sides... and the gates of Jerusalem will reach Damascus'.

With this we may be able to understand that Reuven and Gad didn't want to give up

their right and their privilege to enter the Holy Land but rather to facilitate the expansion of its boundaries beyond the original physical borders. How is this possible? How does the land or the holiness of the land expand?

Reuven and Gad, with their sheep and cattle, had the ability to provide sustenance and livelihood for Am Yisrael. Their suggestion to Moshe, in their eyes, was for the betterment and welfare of the Jewish people. Moshe, at first, was taken aback and disappointed by the mere suggestion of not going into the land and assisting their brethren. Following the discussion, the commitment and the binding promise that Gad and Reuven would be there to help Am Yisrael it became clear that the request was not a narrow interest but rather an act of Ahavat Yisrael. This Ahavat Yisrael, responsibility and care for one another has the potential to expand the holiness of Eretz Yisrael beyond its initial boundaries.

In the midst of mourning the Churban and the Galut, we can learn that Ahavat Yisrael the love for all Jews, mutual responsibility and caring has the potential to expand the Kedusha to the entire world.

Shabbat Shalom.

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