BS”D

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Parshas Pinchas

Who Did and Who Did Not Make It Into Eretz Yisroel

By Rabbi Chaim Zev Citron

In this week’s Parsha, Pinchas, the Torah tells us about the counting of the Jewish people that preceded their entry into the Land of Canaan. The Torah tells us that in this count there wasn’t a single man of those who had been counted by Moshe and Aaron almost 40 years earlier. All of them had died in the desert with the exception of Calev ben Yefuneh and Yehoshua bin Nun.

Rashi points out that the Torah says there wasn’t a single *man*. But there were women who had survived. Unlike the men, the women loved the land and the decree that the men would not enter the land did not apply to the women.

Were there indeed no men who survived? What about Eliezer, the Cohen Gadol, and his son Pinchas? Both the Ibn Ezra and the Ramban say that when the Torah says no men of the original count survived, it is referring to the counting of the Israelites and not to the original count of the Leviim which was done separately. Thus, the decree did not apply to the tribe of Levi, and indeed there might have been members of that tribe, including Elazar and Pinchas who did survive the 40 years in the desert and entered Eretz Canaan. The Levites had not joined the rest of the Israelites in rejecting the land of Israel when the spies returned with their bad report. They were therefore not subject to the punishment of not living to enter the land.

The Abarbanel disagrees. He feels the decree did affect the Levites. If they were exempt, the Torah should have clearly stated it. As far as Elazar, he was an exception since it was necessary for him to survive as the High Priest.

A weakness of this view is that the Torah lists only two exceptions (Calev and Yehoshua). If Elazar was an exception, he should have been listed as well whereas according to the other commentators, Elazar is not an individual exception; the decree did not apply to the tribe of Levi from the start.

There’s a marvelous Kli Yakar that explains why the women were allowed to enter the land. There are two reason: One has to do with their modesty and moral uprightness and the other with their generosity.

There are places that engender certain moral and/or ethical traits. Shitim, for example, was a place and an environment that lent itself to moral licentiousness. Indeed, the men of Israel succumbed to the temptation and engaged in immoral activity with the Moavite and Midianite women.

On the other hand, the land of Israel as a whole is a place that does not tolerate immoral behavior. The Torah says that the Canaanites forfeited their right to the land, they were “spit out” by the land because of their immoral behavior. One of the reasons the Jewish men rejected the land of Israel (after the return of the spies) was that it was a land that demanded very high moral standards. They had a problem with that. The women, however, did not have a problem. Their moral standards were quite high and thus they were happy to enter Eretz Yisroel.

The sages point out that earlier in the Parsha, when the individual families of the tribes are listed, each family’s name begins by the letter Hey and ends with the letter Yud, both letters of Hashem’s name, to attest to the fact that their lineage was pure and no immoral acts led to their birth. This was to the credit of the Jewish women who, even under the very trying conditions of Egyptian servitude, maintained the highest moral standards and did not engage in any forbidden relationships.

The Kli Yakar says that the women excelled in another area as well.

Why is it that the obligation to give the agricultural tithes to the Cohanim, Leviim, the poor etc. applies only in the land of Israel?

According to the Torah, the land of Israel did not need to be irrigated to grow its major crops. (The only exception was vegetables which had to be irrigated.) The rain provided enough water. Now, in other countries such as Egypt, irrigation was a necessity. This entailed a considerable amount of additional work above and beyond ploughing, harvesting, etc.

Since in Israel, G-d did the work of irrigation for us, in a manner of speaking, by providing rain, it is only right that we reimburse Him for His generosity by giving tithes to His servants, the Cohanim and Leviim. Whereas in other lands, where the farmers had to do much more work, G-d did not demand tithes.

The men were stingy. They did not want to go to the land of Israel where they would be “taxed” with the tithes. “We used to eat in Egypt for free,” they complained. The sages interpreted this as “free of Mitzvos,” i.e., we could keep whatever food we produced without the Mitzvah of tithing.

The women, on the other hand, were happy to give. In fact, the Mitzvah of giving Challah to the Cohen is a specialty of the woman. Thus, they wanted to go to Israel because they relished the opportunity to do the Mitzvos of giving to others.

The embodiment of these characteristics were the daughters of Zelaphchad. Zelapchad and his daughters were descended from Yosef. Yosef represents both moral strength, as seen by his overcoming the attempted seduction by the wife of Potiphar. Yosef also represents giving to others, as we see how he supported his extended family during the famine in Egypt.

His descendants, the five daughters of Zelaphchad, were the true heirs to these two qualities. They are described in the Talmud as both “wise” and “righteous.” Wisdom is the opposite of the foolishness of immoral conduct. “Righteous” means practicing “tzedaka,” the act of sharing and giving. Thus, with these two qualities, they loved the land and were not included in the decree to not enter Canaan. Indeed, they merited to go into Eretz Yisroel.

This year, this parsha comes in proximity to the twelfth and thirteenth of Tammuz which marks the liberation of the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe from Soviet imprisonment.

On the day the Rebbe was freed, he said a *ma’amar*, a formal Chassidic discourse. In this discourse, he talked about, among other things, the selfish and self-centered natures that we possess. By nature, we are indulgent, by nature we seek honor for ourselves, by nature we look at other negatively. “All day and all night, he pursues his heart’s desires like an animal. All that he thinks about …. Is how to fulfill off of his desires for pleasure,” the Rebbe wrote.

How do we change ourselves? Torah is the cure, the elixir, that transforms us from self-centeredness to G-d-consciousness. Studying by oneself, attending shiurim, spreading Torah study to others elevates a person immeasurably. Going to Shul to pray with a Minyan regularly, learning before and after prayer, melts away the yetzer hora, the evil inclination and changes one’s life.

I would like to connect the Rebbe’s teaching to what we talked about in Parshas Pinchas. The world we live in today, western society as a whole, is full of immoral values and temptations. We sometimes don’t even realize how we are influenced by the popular culture, how our standards have diminished, how we are utterly desensitized to *kedusha*, to holiness.

Only a lifestyle that places tefila and Torah study at the center of our lives can immunize us from moral corruption. Only a genuine commitment and love of learning Torah can overcome the culture without and the coarse animal soul within.

Serious commitment to public prayer, serious commitment to regular Torah study can and will open our hearts to holiness and G-dliness.