

Parsha Ponders

Mattos / Masei | July 15, 2020 | 23 Tammuz 5780

Clean from suspicion¹

ונכבשה הארץ לפני יקוק ואחר תשבו והייתם נקיים מיקוק ומישראל והיתה הארץ הזאת לכם לאחזה לפני יקוק

Once the land is conquered before Hashem, then you can return. You shall [then] be deemed innocent [in the eyes] of Hashem and the Jewish People. This land shall [then] be yours for an inheritance, before Hashem²

After the Jews conquered the land on the east side of the Jordan River, it became considered part of the land of Israel. The land of Israel proper, on the west side of the Jordan River, still had to be conquered. Two and a half tribes, that of Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe, requested for the opportunity to have their portion be solely in the land on the east side of the Jordan River. Moshe took this to mean that they weren't interested in helping their brethren conquer the rest of the land of Israel. This could lead to distrust, quarrels, and maybe even civil war. Moshe reasoned with them that they'll be allowed to be the sole inheritors of this part of the land if they help with the war effort on the west side of the Jordan. Upon victory, they'll be welcome to return to their families on the east side of the Jordan River, and begin to settle it.

Moshe used an interesting phrase when he made his stipulation with these two and a half tribes. He said that if they help conquer the land of Israel, והייתם נקיים, only then will they be cleared of suspicion, and deemed innocent, in the eyes of Hashem and of the Jewish People. This phrase serves as a prototype for a Jew's behavior throughout their life. It teaches us that a Jew must maintain a clear record with regards to their Heavenly obligations, as well as their interpersonal ones³. *Mitzvos* should be fulfilled to their completion, with the proper intent and concentration. As well, one should avoid the suspicion of one's fellow that they are lacking in this regard⁴.

The Chasam Sofer, one of the greatest minds and *halachic* decisors from two-hundred years ago, shares with us that he found this to be one of the most difficult things in Judaism to properly observe. והייתם נקיים, we must be innocent in the eyes of Hashem and the Jewish People, contains two injunctions. He writes that the first one is actually much easier to fulfill than the second. A person knows what Hashem wants from them. They can study the laws, and fulfill them to the T. They can work on themselves to make sure that they have the right intents and attitudes.

However, when it comes interpersonal *mitzvos* and relationships with other people, it's much harder. How can we ever know what someone else expects from us? People will always have their strange thoughts. People who want to suspect you of wrongdoing will do so, regardless of your innocence or efforts. Due to the ease with which one can be neglectful in this area, *Chazal* enacted many decrees to avoid suspicion of wrongdoing. One example is with regards to Chanukah.

If a person's property has two entrances which aren't visible to each other, they have to light a Menorah at both of them⁵. If they only do one, maybe someone will walk by the other and think that the person

¹ Based on Teshuvos Chasam Sofer 6:59

² Numbers 32:22

³ Shekalim 3:4. See also Mesillas Yesharim Chapters 10-12

⁴ See <https://tvunah.org/פרשת-מטות-והייתם-נקיים/> by Rav Asher Weiss

⁵ Shabbos 23a

neglected to fulfill the *mitzvah* of Chanukah. Even though there are many valid reasons why a person's entranceway may not have a Menorah lit! For example, they plan to but haven't yet, or it got stolen, or they are away on vacation. Still, there will always be people who judge negatively. To avoid such eventualities, *Chazal* decreed to go beyond the letter of the law, in order to fulfill והייתם נקיים.

Shlomo HaMelech writes⁶ that there isn't a person on this Earth who hasn't sinned. The Chasam Sofer wonders if it's perhaps because of this injunction of והייתם נקיים. A person could be completely exacting in all the rules of the Torah their whole life, but could very easily have irked someone or aroused their suspicion. Furthermore, and we can't judge our ancestors, but perhaps even the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe were guilty of not fulfilling their obligations in this matter. True, they kept to their word, and fought alongside their brethren in the battles to conquer the land. They satisfied their obligations towards Hashem. However, we are taught that they were the first tribes to be exiled, before the remaining members of the Ten Lost Tribes⁷. Perhaps it was because they didn't satisfy their obligations towards their fellow Jew. It could be that they still aroused the suspicion of their brethren by separated themselves, that they were in a sense not united with them in heart and in deed⁸.

This isn't the only comparison made between Man and G-d with regards to our behavior. *Chazal* also extort us to find favor and grace in the eyes of G-d as well as our fellow man⁹. Obviously we have to be in Hashem's good books. However, besides avoiding the suspicion of others with our daily activities, our deeds must be pleasant to those around us. They should inspire others, and draw them closer to the Torah. Just like a suspicious activity could profane the name of G-d, Heaven forbid, a pleasant demeanor and gracious behavior could sanctify G-d's name¹⁰. May we all merit to find favor in everyone's eyes, whether it be Man's, or G-d's.

Good Shabbos

⁶ Ecclesiastes 7:20

⁷ Bamidbar Rabbah 22:7; Eichah Rabbah Pesikta § 5; Midrash Tanchuma Mattos § 5; Tanchuma Yashan Mattos § 8 point out that these tribes were exiled before their brothers. The reason given is that they separated themselves from their brothers. This could be the intent of the Chasam Sofer, as will be evident momentarily. These *midrashim* don't specify how many years they were exiled before the rest of the tribes. Rashi to Isaiah 8:23 says it was eight years earlier. He seems to have some source that I couldn't locate. See Ba'al HaTurim to Numbers 32:1 who points out that the phrase ובני ראובן בני גד appears eight times in this *parsha*, hinting to the eight years. See also Bamidbar Rabbah 22.9 and Midrash Tanchuma Mattos § 7, quoting Proverbs 20:21

⁸ See the above article from Rav Asher Weiss for an explanation for why the punishment for interpersonal suspicion would be so severe. He sees from the Chasam Sofer's words that it could lead to a *chillul Hashem* (see note 10)

⁹ Shekalim loc. cit., quoting Proverbs 3:4. See also Avos 2:1 with Be'ur HaGra and Derech Chaim

¹⁰ Rav Asher Weiss loc. cit.