

Mattot-Massei – Shabbat 18 July 2015

Consider this; the Children of Israel are encamped on the eastern flank of the Jordan, preparing to enter the land. The tribes of Gad and Reuben and half of the tribe of Menashe approach Moshe with the following request.

“This land is all fertile land, rather than enter Canaan, we want to stay on this side of the Jordan, where there is land for our abundant herds, and make a home here!”

Moshe initially reacts angrily. He says the following:

“And when the people enter the land –they will have to fight and conquer the land- and will you remain here whilst your brothers go out to war without your help?”

The response was: “We will build cities here in this land, and then we will come and help our compatriots to conquer Canaan, once this is done, we will return to the eastern side of the Jordan.”

Moshe changes his mind, and he says to them that if they help conquer the land, to drive out the enemies, and following this, they return to the land east of the Jordan; then they will be vindicated from G-d and **Israel**.

The Talmud in Yoma 38a comments: It makes a difference if one is exonerated by G-d ,after all, that is the purpose of our existence; one has to do what is right in the eyes of G-d. However, what difference does it make to the Israelites, that they see these two and a half tribes venturing out to war and defending the land?

The Talmud infers from this a very profound lesson. In our everyday dealings- not only must we be upright and clean in the eyes of G-d but also in the eyes of Israel our compatriots, we need to be above suspicion.

In Jewish law we deduce from this a whole body of law called *Marit Ha-ayin*; it’s not just between man and G-d that is important but even those aspects between man and his neighbour; appearances are important.

An example given is that those appointed to collect charity are instructed with a body of laws to ensure that they are not suspected of doing anything inappropriate: they should not have a double hem in their clothing, they should collect money with a second person, and somebody else should be present when they count the money, all in order that they should be seen to be upright in the eyes of their fellow man.

It’s all common sense, all part of Judaism. Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai was on his deathbed. His disciples were all around waiting to hear pearls of wisdom from their teacher.

He says the following...“May it be the will of G-d that your fear of G-d should equal that of your fear of flesh and blood; man.”

The disciples look to their beloved teacher and say: “This is it? This is the standard that you expect of us?”

He responded: “if only!!”

Have a great Shabbos!