

Parshas Matos

Asking the Right Question

In *Parshas Matos*, the *Torah* describes the request of the tribes of *Reuvain*, *Gad* and part of *Menashe* to remain in Transjordan and not take their share of *Eretz Yisrael*. *Moshe Rabeinu's* response to their request is very harsh. He compares them to the spies who demoralized the entire nation and discouraged them from undertaking the conquest of *Canaan*. The devastating outcome was that an entire generation lost its privilege to enter the Land of Israel. He calls them, "תרבות אנשים חטאים" - an ill-bred group of sinful people," who come to anger *Hashem* once again. Once the petitioners clarify that they intend to join the campaign to conquer *Canaan* and to return to Transjordan after the Jewish people are settled in *Eretz Yisrael*, *Moshe* is mollified and willing to lay out the stipulation for such a deal.

The commentators are puzzled at *Moshe Rabeinu's* first response. What had the petitioners said that indicated poor intent to deserve such a tongue lashing? One approach to this problem lies in the way that they framed the rationale of the request. Too much emphasis was put on the material possessions and too little on what is truly important. They began by saying that the lands of Transjordan were good for grazing their abundant livestock. They even mentioned setting up pens for their sheep before they discussed settling their families. This showed that they had gotten caught up in their business lives and had lost perspective of what is truly important.

Rav Reuvain Feinstein Shlita (*Rosh Yeshiva Mesivta Tiferes Yerusahalayim*, Staten Island) offered a second resolution to this problem. He says that *Moshe's* strong reaction to their request was that they presented a solution with the problem. *Reuvain* and *Gad* should have stated the issue and then waited for a response as was done by *Tzelafchad's* daughters in last week's *parsha*. Instead, they made a proposal to change *Hashem's* plan of the division of *Eretz Yisrael*. That was presumptuous for them to do since *Hashem* would decide how to modify the plan.

These two ideas are connected. Often, we try to push an agenda because we get hyperfocused on an outcome that we want without realizing that we are out of line. This happens when we lose perspective of our priorities. We need to keep a focus on our life's mission statement to remember what is truly important.