

WHAT A ROPE, A WINDOW AND A WALL CAN TEACH US ABOUT DOING TESHUVA: LESSONS FROM RACHAV

BY SHULAMIT RUBIN

20 of Menachem Av 5775 and August 5th.

Shulamit asked us to revisit the story of the 2 meraglim (spies) and Rachav. Even though we all know the story and we know how it ends, she asks us to start at the beginning of the story. Imagine, she says, what it was like for these 2 spies to come into Eretz Caanan by way of the city of Yericho-what would the experience be like-to come into a strange land to try to figure out the situation?

They come into the land-where should they stay? Who should they trust? We see they choose to stay at the inn of Rachav-there were surely other inns available-why did they choose her inn? Could she be trusted? How would they know?

Sefer Yehoshua tells us how it was; in perek chof (chapter 20) the novie writes that the 2 meraglim (spies) came to Yericho and came to the house of 'an Yisha Zona'-a harlot. Right away, Shulamit asks us a question: why is Rachav's name mentioned? Many women we encounter in the Torah; their names are not mentioned; Yisha HaShunamis; Ashes Monoach. So right away, this stares out at us-why is Rachav's name mentioned?

We see, she must have told them to come rest in her house, which they did and almost immediately the King of Yericho's messengers are at Rachav's door accusing her of harboring spies. The King's messengers demand that she send them out. Her house was in the actual wall of the city, she is a harlot, she is a harlot for many years, men are constantly going into her house-did the King ever notice anyone before? Why did he notice these men and why did he notice them so quickly?

The posuk says, that upon hearing the messengers' words, **וַתִּצְפְּנֵם** she immediately hid them. Another question: did she hide them immediately when they arrive, knowing that the King was watching her house. She could tell they were spies and the King would be coming, so she hid them, or did she only do it while the King's messengers were screaming for their release outside her home?

She answered the King's messengers; 'Yes, these men came to my house, my clientele are men and I have hundreds of men who come to my house, I don't know why these men came. If you want to catch them, run, they just left, you will probably be able to catch them.'

Where did she hide them? On her roof under flax and she said to them: in the 9th posuk, she says:

וְתֹאמַר אֶל הָאֲנָשִׁים יַדְעֵתִי כִּי נָתַן יְהוָה לָכֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְכִי נִפְלָה אִימַתְכֶם עָלֵינוּ וְכִי נִמְגַּו כָּל יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵיכֶם:

And she said to the men, I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away because of you.

Rachav says to the 2 spies: I know this is a done deal. Hashem, your G-d has given this land to you. She testifies that every man in the land is terrified and quaking in his boots from the approaching Jewish nation.

And she continues;

כִּי שָׁמַעְנוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר הוֹבִישׁ יְהוָה אֶת מִיַּם סוּף מִפְּנֵיכֶם בְּצִאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם וְאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם לְשָׁנֵי מַלְכֵי הָאֲמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן לְסִיחוֹן וְלִעֹוג אֲשֶׁר הִחָרְמְתֶם אוֹתָם

For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt; and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you completely destroyed

And on the basis of this she extracts from the 2 spies a promise: that when they return to the land, they should save her immediate family.

The spies agree to save her family but command her not to divulge to anyone that they are in the land. She lowers them with a ROPE-her house was within the walls of Yericho. She told them to go hide for 3 days in the mountains, after which the King's soldiers will have stopped looking for them, and they will be safe.

Once they are lowered, they change their promise and tell her that she is to hang a red scarf from her WINDOW. This way when they return, they will recognize her house, and whoever is in her house will be saved. And again, they tell her, if she divulges any information about them, they are free from this promise.

She does as she is told. The spies return to Yehoshua, report what they have heard, that the nations of Caanan are afraid of them, and Yehoshua says, 'surely Hashem has given us this land.'

This is the story as it is written in Sefer Yehoshua, now Shulamit started to explain what exactly was occurring.

Why then did the spies choose to stay in Rachav's inn? Why is her name mentioned? Firstly, these 2 spies, were huge tsaddikim, Kolav ben Yifuna-who was one of the spies who originally had come to the land and who had reported back properly to Moshe Rabbeinu and Pinchas Hakohen, who defended Hashem's name. Even though they were incognito, we see they were immediately recognized by the King's messengers, that these were 2 Jews who had come to spy the land. Even in disguise their greatness shone through. They entered the land, wanting to get a feeling of the place. When they heard that there was an innkeeper by the name of 'rachav' this name meant something to them. Rachav means wide-maybe she is wide-headed, meaning not closed in-she has more of a worldly view-maybe she understands what is happening around her? So they chose her inn and they were correct in their assumption of her.

Now what was Rachav thinking? Was she sincere in wanting to help these 2 spies?

The Zohar explains that when Moshe Rabbeinu sent out the spies, one of his instructions to them was: Do trees grow in the land? Of course, it has its literal meaning-is there vegetation there? But on a deeper level, Moshe Rabbeinu was asking the spies to come back and report to him, if there are 'trees' are there people there who can be compared to 'trees'? Meaning: people with depth, thinking people who will come to recognize Hashem (our tsaddikim are called 'trees' because they are our spiritual trees-we live off of their fruit)

Moshe Rabbeinu knew that once the land would be conquered by the Jews, they would not be allowed to take any converts from the 70 nations who inhabit the land, therefore, he was asking them to check if there were any 'trees' any people who on their own would want to convert to Yiddishkeit.

The initial spies failed this test. They came back and reported that the inhabitants were **עזי פנים ועזי לב.**

No they said, these people are obstinate people, they are not converting to Yiddishkeit. But they were wrong, there was a girl name Rachav, who was wide-eyed and awe-struck by world events. The first spies did not find her. Now again, Yehoshua gives to Kolav and Pinchas instructions before they depart,' this is our last chance to get converts, see if there are any 'trees' in the land.' So once they heard the name 'rachav' this resonated with the spies and therefore they chose her inn.

When they came to her inn, they watched her closely. They had to determine if she was sincere or not. She also was watching them closely, could she trust them to come back and save her family. Being that Kolav and Pinchas were 2 big tsaddikim, they were immediately able to see that she was sincere.

And what does she tell them? What had she heard? She tells them that she had heard of Yitzias Mitzraim and Kriyas Yam Suf-the splitting of the Red Sea-that had happened 40 years ago, when she was a girl of 10-but she has remembered it. And now just recently the Jews won over the 2 big nations who lived on the other side of the River Jordan- Sichon and Og. She put these 2 events together-she was a 'tree' she was thinking. Nothing is random. Since Kriyas Yam Suf, for the past 40 years, she has been a harlot but now she is willing to become a convert. And at the age of 50 she converts to Yiddishkeit.

The Gemara says, had Bnei Yisroel not sinned in the desert, right after Mattan Torah, they would have entered into Eretz Yisroel. Rachav was a girl of 10 then, she would have converted. But instead 40 years transpired. We wandered and she wandered as well in the interim years.

There are many explanations as to what she means when she says she sinned with a rope, a window and a wall and she asks Hashem to forgive her for these 3 sins:

Men left her house through her window and she lowered them out with a rope (flax) and they were able to leave the city because her house was part of the wall of Yericho, so once lowered they were outside the city.

She uses these 3 things to do teshuva.

The Ramban says, that in order for one to do teshuva: one has to be in exactly the same situation one was in when the sin was committed and then not do the sin. This happened to Rachav now, when these 2 tzaddikim came to her house. She hid them under the flax, she lowered them by rope from her window to safety. So she did teshuva for her sins with the same method she had originally committed the sins.

Another beautiful explanation to her doing teshuva: Rachav says to Hashem I sinned in the 3 mitzvos given to women: ner (candle) challah (bread) and nida. The question is these are mitzvos for Jewish women. She was not Jewish so how could she have sinned in this way?

The Gemara in Yerushalymi explains that women die in childbirth because of 3 sins: ner, challah and nida. Why? Adom HaRishon was meant to live forever, once Chava got him to eat from the Eitz Haadas, death came to the world. Jewish women bring 'tikun' to the world for this sin by performing their 3 mitzvos.

How so? Adom is called Challa shel Olam-the challa of the world. Why? Because Hashem so to speak kneaded him, made him from dust and the mist (water) of the world. Since Chava ruined the 'challah of the world' she now has the mitzvah of taking challa to repent for this sin.

Adam is called 'domu shel olam' the blood of the world-the life force of the world. Chava introduced death to the world so to repent she has the mitzvah of nidda, which has to do with blood-which give us life.

Adam is called 'neru shel olam' the light of the world. Again Chava extinguished the 'light of the world' so to repent, women have to light the Shabbos neiros-shabbos candles.

Chava is a universal woman, she is not Jewish. What she did affected all mankind, so all women are obligated to do teshuva for Chava's sin. Rachav is as her name portrays 'wide' she understands all of this: Her inn corresponds to the mitzvah of 'challah' so she wants to use her inn, which in Hebrew is called a 'bais mozon'-a place to sell food-challah

She used her femininity in the wrong way-so she wants to take upon herself the mitzvah of 'niddah' to repent for this. The 'choma' the wall represents this mitzvah of 'niddah' because we Jewish women build a 'wall' around ourselves when we are in 'niddah'

The window-the chalon corresponds to the 'ner' the light. Light comes through the window, she violated Hashem's light by her actions as a harlot and so she wants to grasp onto the 'rope', the rope of the Jewish people and be part of our nation.

As we enter into Elul and soon Rosh Hashona, let us learn from the Rachav inside each and every one of us, how we can listen to our inner voices and transform ourselves and bring ourselves to accept the kedusha and beauty that Hashem is waiting to give to us in the upcoming Yomim Noarim.