

# SICHA SUMMARY

## Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 28

### *Shelach, Sicha 2*

#### The Context:

Parshas Shelach concludes with the sacrificial remedy for an inadvertent act of idolatry, and then with the shocking incident of the wood gatherer. While the Jews were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on Shabbos. He was brought before Moshe and Aharon, but they were unsure of his punishment. G-d commanded that he be stoned to death, and the community carried out the execution. (Bamidbar 15:32-36)

#### The Question:

What is the thematic connection between the story of the wood gatherer, the prohibition against idolatry, and the main theme of the parshah, the sin of the spies?

Tosfos offers an positive motive for the wood-gatherers actions, which also explains its relevance to the saga of the spies:

"He intended it for the sake of Heaven, for some were saying: Since it was decreed upon them that they would not enter the Land because of the sin of the spies, they

were no longer obligated in the commandments. He stood and desecrated Shabbos so that he would be executed, and others would see."

But to illustrate the continued obligation of the commandments, the man could have chosen a lesser offense that would result in a lighter punishment, why did the man choose to desecrate the Shabbos, a severe transgression that is subject to capital punishment?

#### The Explanation:

Maharsha explains that the wood-gatherer did not actually commit a sin, but rather only appeared to do so. On Shabbos, a forbidden activity is only forbidden if one intentionally performs that labor for the sake of using or benefiting from the object or action that was forbidden. Thus, if one digs a hole in a field that isn't meant to be plowed, only in order to use the dirt, it is not punishable since he did not intend to prepare the land for plowing.

In this instance, the wood-gatherer did not intend to gather wood for the sake of the wood, which would be forbidden. He performed this action for a non-related purpose — to illustrate the continued

relevance of mitzvos. Thus, he was not technically culpable for desecrating Shabbos.

This explains why he specifically chose to violate Shabbos as opposed to other commandments, since only with Shabbos can you appear to sin, while not really performing the sin.

Nonetheless, he was held culpable, and punished, by a human court of law. Human courts do not have access to internal motivations, they must judge based on external actions. Thus his motive was pure, he did not actually desecrate the Shabbos, yet he was still punished, revealing the continued applicability of the commandments.

This explains why this story follows the laws concerning idolatry — because both the wood-gatherer and the sin of idolatry underscore the primacy of action over motivations. Idolatry is essentially a sin of thought and intention. If a person does an empty act of worship to a foreign deity without any intention to serve it, the person

has not transgressed. Yet Jews have always sacrificed their lives rather than even perform a coerced, external, meaningless act of idol worship. This is because we recognize the primacy of action over intention. Thus, the wood gatherer was a living example of the principle of idolatry — that our actions speak loudest.

Now we can appreciate why both these passages occur after the sin of the spies. Chassidus explains that the generation of the spies preferred to remain in the desert where they could focus on an intellectual relationship with G-d's wisdom, as opposed to the mundane, action-oriented life that would be expected of them in the Land of Israel. When G-d decreed that they would therefore not enter Israel, they reasoned that they were entirely exempt from the world of action. The wood-gatherer therefore sacrificed himself to demonstrate that action was still necessary and important, even in a law that was defined more by motivation and intention, such as the labor prohibitions of Shabbos.

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