



Jericho, Circles and Remembering the Goal

“**A**nd G-d said to Yehoshua, ‘See I have given you Yericho... and you shall go around the city...encircle the city once. Thus you shall do for six days...On the seventh day you shall go around the city seven times’...So they did for six days... on the seventh day... they went around the city in this manner seven times” (Yehoshua 6).

Can one read these words and not immediately picture the *Hoshanot* we recite throughout Sukkot? Why is Sukkot the time we reenact the Jewish people’s conquest of Yericho?

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that circling Yericho demonstrated we were not going to be influenced by the spiritual contamination of the inhabitants of the city, and by extension those who lived in the Land of Israel. The Yericho-like imagery of the circling of the *bima* on Sukkot comes to remind us that one of the goals of the holiday is to combat the negative spiritual impact of the “70 nations of the world,” as symbolized by the 70 special Sukkot sacrifices offered in decreasing order.

When Israel was divided among the tribes, 500 square *amot* of Yericho, the precise size of the Temple Mount, was designated for the tribe that would host the Beit HaMikdash (Sifri Beha’alotcha 81). The Gemara (Taanit 27a) teaches that when each of the 24 groups of *Kohanim* had their two-week rotation to serve, half went to Yerushalayim to work in the Beit HaMikdash and half went to Yericho to secure food and water for the half working in the Mikdash.

The Mishna (Tamid 3:8) lists nine sounds that emanated from the Beit HaMikdash – including the *shofar* blasts and the songs of the *Levi'im* – and were heard in Yericho. Similarly, the fragrance of the incense burnt in the Beit HaMikdash could be smelled in Yericho. The Raavad explains that the sounds were not heard and the fragrance could not be smelled by any of the cities between Yerushalayim and Yericho. They miraculously reached Yericho, and Yericho alone.

The Raavad teaches that just like before eating the crops of Israel one must separate *teruma* for the *Kohanim*, Yericho was the first city captured upon entering Israel and it is sanctified as *teruma* for G-d. This can explain why Yehoshua forbade anyone to take the spoils of Yericho for their personal use. Just like the holiness of the Beit HaMikdash meant items belonging to it could not be taken and used by individuals, the same applied to Yericho.

But didn’t Rabbeinu Bachya teach that Yericho represented the spiritual contamination of the inhabitants of the Land of Israel? How can it be holy like Yerushalayim and the Beit HaMikdash?

When walking around the city seven times, the people were led by the *Aron*, which carried the *luchot*, as they encircled the city. The act of simply following the *Aron*, while walking in circles as our first act upon entering the Land of Israel, demonstrated our recognition that we enter the Land to follow the Torah and gain the spiritual benefits of the Land. In

doing so, we combat all impurities in the physical land and elevate it to high spiritual levels.

Sukkot is the holiday during which we ask G-d for rain and success with the coming year’s crops. This focus on physical hopes and aspirations always runs the risk of pulling us away from G-d and spirituality. Thus, while asking G-d for rain during the *Hoshanot* ceremony, we reenact what our ancestors did before conquering Yericho, elevating it from the lowest levels of contamination to the highest levels of spirituality akin to Jerusalem and the Beit HaMikdash. This reminds us that as we pray for physical blessings in the Land of Israel, the ultimate goal of this physical success is to enable us to focus on reaping the spiritual blessings this Land has to offer the Jewish people.

As we circle the *bima* with our *lulav* and *etrog* and beg G-d to bless the Land of Israel with a successful rainy season, let us remember that the goal of physical blessings in the Land of Israel is to help us focus on Torah, *mitzvot*, and to become a holy people, experiencing a close relationship with G-d.

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