

Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven said to Moshe... Your servants shall do as my lord commands... And your servants shall cross over, every armed person of the legion, before Hashem, to do battle, as my lord speaks. (32:25,27)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* exhorted *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* to assume their share of the battle of conquering *Eretz Yisrael*, concluding, “*V’nichb’shah ha’aretz lifnei Hashem, v’achar tashuvu*,” “And the Land; shall be conquered before Hashem, and then you shall return” (ibid 32:22). *Chazal* (*Midrash*) comment that Moshe’s statement, *V’achar tashuvu*, “And then you shall return,” was fulfilled *b’m’lo muvan ha’milah*, to the word. Every member of *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* returned home from the war and apportioning of the Land, a total of fourteen years. Not a single one died, not even of natural causes! *Tzaddik gozeir v’Hakadosh Boruch Hu mekayeim*; the *tzaddik*, righteous person, issues a decree, and Hashem fulfills his request.

The *Maharil Diskin*, *zl*, explains that this is why the Torah first quotes *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* as saying, “Your servants shall do as my lord commands... The *anshei tzavah*, men of the legion, the soldiers who fought the war, were between the ages of twenty and sixty years old. The second group, the *chalutzei tzavah*, armed men of the legion, was comprised of those who were past the age of the draft, sixty years old, who really did not have to go, but went anyway, due to a sense of *achrayus*, responsibility, for *Klal Yisrael*; they responded, *kaasher adoni doveir*, “As my lord speaks.” Hashem had issued no command for them to go. When they heard, however, Moshe’s assurance that all would return, granting them fourteen years of life, they were going. Moshe’s word meant something to them.

The word/promise/assurance of a *tzaddik* is like money in the bank. A young man was studying diligently in *yeshivah* and had reached marriageable age. He had decided that the time was ripe to look for his life’s companion. He met a young woman who hailed from a fine family. She was replete with *middos tovos*, refined character traits, G-d-fearing and kind-hearted. Two weeks following their engagement, the *kallah* began to have headaches- accompanied by body tremors. The *chassan’s* mother began to worry. Two weeks later, the *kallah* told her *chassan* the bleak news: she had developed a grave illness that would require treatment. With the help of the Almighty, she was hopeful for a recovery. She told him that she understood that he may want to break the *shidduch*, engagement, and move on with his life. He looked at her incredulously, “What are you saying? Absolutely not. We are in this together!” The young woman was a bit more perspicacious. She said, “Let us wait and see how your parents feel. Talk it over with them, and then you can make your decision.”

The young *chassan* came home and spoke with his parents. They sympathized with the young woman and her family, but they “agreed” that the *shidduch* should be severed. When the *chassan* argued, his mother countered, “Do you not think it strange that she became sick right after the

engagement?" She was intimating that the illness had not just appeared now, that the girl had not been well prior to their engagement. The *chassan* was not budging. He would not forsake his *kallah* at such a difficult time. The parents felt that, after a few days, he would come to his senses.

The *chassan* returned to his *yeshivah* and studied diligently. A week passed, and he called his *kallah* to inquire about her health. Her mother answered with a question, "Why are you calling? The *shadchan*, matchmaker, has informed us that the *shidduch* is off." The young man was floored, "No one can break this *shidduch* except me, and I will marry your daughter!" The young man went home and asked his parents to allow him to make his own decisions. They countered, "Let us ask *daas Torah*. We want to ask *Chacham Ovadyah Yosef, zl*, and we will abide by his word." Their son agreed, on the condition that they acknowledge up front that he was going only because one does not reject a *gadol*, Torah giant, of *Chacham Ovadyah's* stature. As far as he personally was concerned, his mind was made up: he was marrying his present *kallah*.

The meeting with *Chacham Ovadyah* took place the next day. The *Chacham* first inquired about the young man's learning, his diligence and erudition. He remarked that his father was a distinguished Torah scholar. The *Chacham* then asked the young man if he agreed with his parents, who contended that the girl had been aware of this grave illness prior to the engagement, which would invalidate the engagement. The *chassan* replied that while he could not prove it, in his heart he felt that this was not a ruse. The young lady was a wonderful, sweet, kind, righteous, G-d-fearing woman, everything that he sought in a wife: "I feel that He Who sits upon High is testing my resolve and commitment. This is the young woman with whom I want to spend the rest of my life!" The young man broke down in bitter weeping. The *Chacham* embraced him and, himself weeping, declared, "You will marry her. Hashem will bless her with a complete recovery, and the two of you will establish a beautiful *bayis*, home, for generations to come! As you are stalwartly committed to her, so shall she be to you throughout your life."

The *chassan* walked out of the room and signaled his parents to enter. The *Chacham* said, "At first, I portrayed myself as being antagonistic to the marriage. I wanted to see if he was truly committed. He is – and he will be blessed." When a *gadol* utters his blessing, it is an appeal to Hashem from an individual whose relationship with the Almighty is an inextricable bond. *Chacham Ovadyah Yosef* was a *gadol* whose life was Torah, the lifeblood of our people.

The wedding took place as soon as the *kallah's* treatments had successfully been completed. The *Chacham's* blessings were realized: a healthy mother and father raised eight healthy children. After studying for a number of years in *kollel*, the father became a *rosh yeshivah*, reaching out to hundreds of students. Most of their children were married off, and the next generation was already a part of their lives. Everything seemed perfect until the faithful *chassan* became ill with a dread disease that causes the death of the neurons controlling muscles. It began as weakness and progressed to complete paralysis of everything but his fingers and head. Thirteen years have passed, and his wife has never left his side. Her devotion is beyond belief and indescribable with mere words. *Chacham Ovadyah* came to every milestone and, amid tears, rendered his blessing to

the wife to have the strength and courage to continue her extraordinary work. As her *chassan* stood by her years earlier, she continues to stand by him. *Chacham* Yosef's blessing continues to realize fruit.