

What Comes First?

Come. Please come with us."

"Where are you going?"

"To the Beis HaMedrash to learn Torah."

"That sounds wonderful; however I'm afraid I cannot come now."

"Why not?"

"I must look after my investments first. I am a multi-millionaire and I must check the stock market, the precious metals index, the farm futures, and the real estate values in ten metropolitan areas. After I know that my money is okay, then I can have the peace of mind to sit and learn."

"Very well. As you wish. We hope to see you in the Beis HaMedrash very soon."

"I hope so too."

The tribes of Reuven and Gad had a tremendous amount of cattle. They saw the lands of Ya'zer and Gilad (on the east side of the Yarden). It was good grazing land for cattle. They came to Moshe, Elazar, and the princes, asking them if they could inherit that land, thereby not crossing the Yarden into the Land of Israel. "We will build pens here for our livestock and cities for our small children." (from Bamidbar 32:1-5,16)]. The Medrash Rabba severely criticizes the bnei Gad and Reuven for their actions. "A wise man's heart inclines him to his right hand, but a fool's heart is to his left (Koheles 10:2)." The wise man is Moshe, and the fools are the bnei Gad and Reuven who brushed aside the important issue, and focused on petty things. For they loved their money more than their families . . . Hashem said to them, "You loved your cattle more than your families? You will see no blessing." And so it was that they were the first two tribes to be exiled.

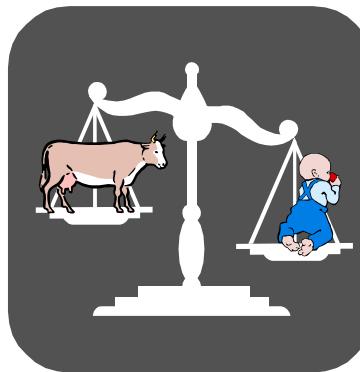
Rav Aharon Kotler explains that the bnei Gad and Reuven had a good intention. They wanted to strengthen their Torah learning and mitzvah observance. The land in the Jordan valley was fitting for their cattle. It would allow them to easily earn a living, thereby leaving more time to learn and serve Hashem. However, they spurned the opportunity to live in the holiness of the Land of Israel. This was a fault. Underlying their request was a desire for money, which flowed from an impure source. They lacked *emunah* (faith) and *bitachon* (trust) in Hashem. Instead, they placed their trust in their wealth.

Rav Aharon relates this to the present *golus* (exile) that we are mourning during these three weeks. A desire for *gashmias* (material possessions) leads to *sinas chinam* (senseless hatred). Physical things are limited. If people desire them, there will never be enough to go around. They

will come to hate those who have more, or who stand in the way of their acquiring more. *Ruchnius*, on the other hand, is unlimited. One can have as much as he wants. A pure desire for it will not bring a person to *sinas chinam*. We must focus our efforts on the *ruchnius*, and let Hashem take care of the *gashmias*.

Kinderlach . . .

*Rav Aharon gives us something to work on these three weeks. Priorities. Our first concern must be ruchnius. How can I improve my tefillah? What will help me learn better? How can I do more chess? Can I find more time to devote to helping Imma? What will help me work on the middah of savlanut (patience)? Can I give more tzedaka? These are some examples of efforts that we can make in improving our ruchnius. Let us work on it, be relaxed about the gashmias, thereby ending *sinas chinam*, and bringing Mashiach!*



Sensitivity

Cxile. A terrible punishment. One who kills a fellow Jew accidentally must flee to an *Ir Miklat* (Refuge City). He is isolated from family, friends, and familiar surroundings. In the days before telephones and mass transportation, this was a traumatic uprooting of one's whole life. He does not belong to the society in the *Ir Miklat*. He did not grow up there. His farm (which was his livelihood) was not there.

How do the residents of the *Ir Miklat* look upon him? Is he a stranger in a strange land, forever condemned to being a foreigner among the natives? Hardly. He is not alone. Other Jews had no portion in the Land of Israel. The Leviim had no farms. Their only source of livelihood was the gifts of *maaser* that they received from their fellow Jews. They lived in *Arei Levayah* (Levite cities). The Keli Yakar (Bamidbar 35:6) explains that these *Arei Levayah* were the *Arei Miklat* (refuge cities). The exiles could feel comfortable there because they were among other "strangers" who had no land.

Of course, the Leviim would not embarrass the exiles by reminding them of their fate. As the Gemora states, "Do not tell your friend about faults that both of you share" (Bava Metziah 59b). If you tell him that he is a stranger, he will say that you are also a stranger because you own no land. Therefore, we see that the exiles were saved the embarrassment of being reminded that they were strangers.

Kinderlach . . .

"Imma, Chaya was sent to the principal because she talked loudly in class." Upon hearing this, Chaya begins to cry. The mother takes Dov aside to speak to him privately. "Dov, I am glad that you told me about Chaya. However, in the future, please tell me in private. You have embarrassed her in front of the family." Kinderlach, do you see how the Torah worries about the feelings of the exile? Even someone who killed a Jew accidentally should not suffer embarrassment. How much more so our friends, classmates, neighbors, and family members.

Parsha Questions:

- ❖ How much time does a husband have to nullify his wife's *neder* (vow)? (30:9)
- ❖ Did Moshe wait to begin the war with Midian? (31:3 and Rashi)
- ❖ What percentage of captured slaves and cattle did the soldiers have to give as *trumah* to Elazar the Kohen? (31:28)
- ❖ How many times did the Bnei Yisrael travel in 38 years? (Rashi 33:1)
- ❖ How many *amos* of fields surrounded each Levite city? How much of that area was for pasture, and how much was for fields and vineyards? (Rashi 35:4)
- ❖ What is the connection between the accidental killer, the refuge city and the Kohen Gadol? (35:25 and Rashi)

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