



# Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פֶּרֶשׁתַּי בְּמַסְעֵי

In this week's parsha, Hakadosh Baruch Hu instructs K'lal Yisroel to designate the arei miklat – cities of refuge - to which a person who has accidentally killed another should flee. The Torah mandates that three such cities be set up in Eretz Yisroel on the west side of the Jordan River, and three on the east side of the Jordan River. Demographically, it shouldn't be this way; since most of the B'nei Yisroel lived west of the Yarden, logic should dictate that there should be more arei miklat where a higher proportion of people lived. Chazal (Makkos 9b) address this and tell us that there were more murderers on the east side of the Jordan River and the need there was therefore greater.

Why this was so, can be understood as follows: In last week's parsha, the tribes of Gad and Reuven approached Moshe Rabeinu, asking if they could stay on the east side of the Yarden, since they “needed” the land to build corrals for their animals, and homes for their families. Their request indicated that their primary concern was for their gashmius endeavors, placing their ruchnius, second. Indeed Chazal criticize them for placing their animals before their wives and children in presenting their request.

From this we see that the B'nei Gad and B'nei Reuven were on a somewhat lower madreigah than the rest of k'lal Yisroel, which makes it understandable that there were more murderers among them. Although the cities of refuge were intended only for one who killed another person accidentally, Chazal tell us megalgelim zechus al yedai zakay, v'chov al yedai



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chayav – that Divine providence brings about good things through those who have merits, and bad by the hands of those who don't. Essentially, when a person is killed in an accident, it is ultimately by Divine decree and it is similarly by Divine decree which directs by whose hands the tragedy will occur. Since the level of the B'nei Gad and B'nei Reuven was not up to par with that of the rest of K'lal Yisroel, they were responsible for more accidental deaths and were therefore in need of more arei miklat.

Yet it goes much further than this. The medrash tells us that one who pursues and takes great interest in his own wealth will not endure. As an example to this, Chazal mention Korach. They then add that this was true of shevet Gad and shevet Reuven as well, and that it was their pursuit of gashmius which caused them to go into exile before the other shevatim. We see from this that the pursuit of gashmius is the cause for golus, which is also the concept of the arei miklat – golus while in Eretz Yisroel. Logically, this makes sense; the more one pursues and puts his life into gashmius, the more distant he becomes from ruchnius, and from Hashem Yisborach. This is golus – distancing oneself from Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

That said, however, we must put this lesson into perspective by understanding about whom we are talking. Chazal tell us that even the so-called lower elements of K'lal Yisroel like Korach were on a tremendous madreigah. To understand their interest in their monetary possessions in the



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same way that we succumb to our desires today is a misrepresentation of truth. Nevertheless, the lesson to be learned remains: the pursuit of gashmius detracts from the ability to grow in ruchnius. Chazal tell us (Avos 6:4) that the way of the Torah includes a diet of bread dipped in salt and water. While for today's generation, this is a level well beyond us, the lesson remains. Attachment to Torah requires a detachment from and certain minimizing of our physical desires. It is only in this way that one can achieve greatness in spiritual endeavors. However, this does not mean that gashmius cannot be enjoyed altogether. Chazal tell us the R' Yehuda HaNassi's table was always filled with the finest foods. Yet before his death he swore that he did not benefit from any of these; his intention in partaking of such physical pleasures was always l'sheim shomayim and he most certainly did not do so in order to pursue his physical desires.

As we enter the nine days leading up to Tisha B'Av, we mourn over the golus we are still in and our detachment from the Shechina. Instead of bemoaning our fate of having a limited choice of foods for supper, why not use the opportunity to understand that a steak or prime rib is not the focus of our day? Food is meant to give our bodies sustenance so that we can pursue more important matters. Perhaps through this shift of focus we can realize what we are lacking. Maybe the desire for ruchnius itself will be enough of a merit to bring about the geulah for which we so desperately yearn.



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## IN SEARCH OF THE CHESED OF HASHEM

The parsha opens with a record of the travels of the Jewish people in the desert. It seems that this should have little relevance on our lives, and indeed, many are bothered by this point. Rashi, points out that most of these 42 transports occurred in either the first or last year of the B'nei Yisroel's 40 year sojourn. In the 38 years in between, they were relocated only 20 times. It seems that the Torah expects us to make this calculation and realize that although Hashem promised to punish us by making us wander, He did a tremendous chesed by limiting our journeys, and added an entire parsha to let us know about it.

HaRav A Y L Shteinman shlit"א observes the greatness of realizing Hakadosh Boruch Hu's chesed. Indeed, this was the reason why He created the world, but we must realize it. To teach us halachos, the Torah will often add no more than an extra letter, despite their enormous ramifications. So, if the Torah felt chesed of Hashem worthy of an entire parsha, then it demonstrates how important it is for us to realize it.

There is chesed in Creation. Imagine if an apple was grey and had no smell or taste, or if everything just tasted like rice cakes. There is chesed in everything that happens, even those which are unpleasant. Our parsha, which records our journeys in the desert, proves this point. This is important to keep in



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mind. Even when times are difficult, Haskadosh Boruch continues to shower us with berachos. Our job is to realize it.

Perhaps it is for this very reason that the Torah doesn't inform us more blatantly. True, it requires us to make the calculation before realizing that more the most part, our travels were limited, but telling us about Hashem's chesed doesn't help us look beyond. If we have to look for it, we will see even more and thank Him for all of it!