

Love of the Land

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Avishai David

Chazal critique Bnei Gad and Reuven for desiring to settle in *Ever Hayarden* (Trans-Jordan). They had large herds of cattle and they wanted the fertile pastureland. They were ready to give up their portion in Eretz Yisroel for their animals. Moshe was distressed and asked them if they would fight with the Jewish people to conquer Israel. They replied that they would.

The Ohr Hachaim explains that the tribes attempted to justify their position. They claimed that *Ever Hayarden* was also a part of Israel. In fact there's a famous Tashbitz which points out that it does indeed have some level of sanctity.

There are two aspects of holiness relating to Israel. There's *kedushat haaretz* (holiness of the land) which requires that one separate *terumot* and *massrot* from all produce and there's *hashra'at haShechina* (the Divine Presence rests there). Although *Ever Hayarden* did not have *hashra'at haShechina* it did have *kedushat haaretz*.

Halachically, leaving Israel is not a simple matter. Even when it's permitted one should recognize that one is leaving a holy place. The Gemara says that if a person wasn't born in the land of Israel but has a great desire to settle there he can become a son of Israel. There were Amaroim who would kiss the earth of Israel reflecting their boundless love for the

land. In Tehilim, King David says, "*Ki ratzu avdecha es avneha* (For your servant desired its stones)" The land is called *eretz hatzvi* (the land of the deer) and *eretz chefet* (the desired land). When Chazal had to leave Israel they would shed tears.

During this period of *bein hamitzraim* it behooves us to reassess our appreciation for the land. Chazal say, "*Kol hamisabel al Yerushalayim zoche v'roeh b'simchoso*" (Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will merit to see it in its rejoicing). If we take the time to think deeply about what we've lost and grieve over what once was, we will ultimately merit to experience *nechamot Tzion* (the consolation of Tzion).

The Grand Scheme- Parshios Matos-Massey

Based on a shiur by Shira Smiles on Sefirat Haomer
Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

In Parshas Massey Hashem gives the command to set aside six 'cities of refuge', as well as the forty two cities of the Leviim, as places where one who kills unintentionally must remain until the death of the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest.

This seems an inordinately severe punishment for an unintentional sin. For almost all accidental trespasses we are able to atone by bringing an offering to the Temple, and we would have been absolved.

Although other accidental sins can be atoned for more easily, the accidental loss of life requires a severe punishment, to teach us that nothing is as important as human life. We must be aware of the sanctity of life. This is the inherent difference between the secular view of life and the Jewish view of life. The secular view of life imposes qualifications on the value of life. That view quantifies life as a product of the quality of life, or the usefulness of life.

In the Jewish view, every hour of life is precious. Every moment is a gift that the Creator has blessed us. Hashem breathed into us as a manifestation of His Spirit at the moment of our creation, and every moment that we live, He is re-enacting that moment of

creation.

The value of our lives is therefore the potential to take our G-dly spark and elevate it through connecting to Hashem's Will. True joy lies in improving ourselves spiritually, in overcoming the urge to sin, and in striving for greater heights. Every time we succeed in one of these areas, we create beauty and serenity in the world, and meaning in our lives.

If someone has inadvertently caused the death of another, it is because for a moment he took the value of life too casually. The accidental murderer has severed the possibility of the victim's continued service of Hashem in this world, and has distanced himself from Hashem as well. Hashem sends him to the city of the Levites, to people whose entire being is dedicated to service to Hashem. In this setting, it is hoped, he will be influenced to learn to appreciate how vigilant he must be in all his actions, especially when it comes to life and death.

He must wait for the death of the High Priest. This teaches the power of prayer. On Yom Kippur, the High Priest is responsible to pray for no accidental deaths among the Jewish People. If accidental deaths do occur, the High Priest's prayer was not effective, and he

is therefore partially responsible for this death. As a result of this, the negligent murderer undoubtedly prays for the death of the High Priest and the end of imprisonment.

No one understands the power of prayer more than a mother. The mother of the High Priest now fills her time with prayer for her son's well-being, hoping to counteract the prayers of the man in custody. She also accepts some of the responsibility. Perhaps she herself was negligent in her duty as a mother. Perhaps she did not impress upon her son, the current High Priest, the importance and power of prayer. Had she done so, his prayers would have been more sincere and effective, and this situation would not have been. Prayer is the physical manifestation of the soul, a vehicle for cleaving to our Maker. Through prayer, Hashem has supplied us with our own individual "city of refuge" on a daily basis. The Shema consists of forty-eight words in total. The first six words, "Shema... Echad," correspond to the six official cities of refuge, while the forty-two words from "Veahavtah... Uvisharechah" are equal to the other forty two Levite cities. If we can immerse ourselves in this prayer, we will be in the environment that nurtures our neshamah.



Connecting to the Destruction Through the 9 Days

Based on a Naaleh.com class by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller Gottlieb

We are approaching the Nine Days of mourning which will one turn into incredible joy. The Three Week period is the backward version of what Hashem gifts us during the Yomim Naroim. The 21 days of Bein Hametzarim parallel the 21 days from Rosh Hashana through Hoshana Rabbah when Hashem comes down to us in the field. In contrast, during the Bein Hametzorim we must come to Him and the suffering is meant to awaken us. The Gemara tells us how Rabbi Yochanon ben Zakai went to speak with the Roman General, Vespasian who gave him a chance to ask for three wishes. He asked for a doctor to heal Rabbi Tarfon and for the family of Raban Gamiliel and for Yavne and its sages to be left unharmed. Rabbi Akiva notes here that he did not ask for Yerushalayim to be saved as Hashem sometimes draws a person's heart away. We needed Yerushalayim's destruction. The only other option would have been the continuous downward and outward flow of constant hatred that we were indulging in which would lead to our ultimate disappearance as a people. Tragically, we needed the suffering for our ultimate existence as a people. As we are still in exile, we obviously still need it. That doesn't mean we want it and it is definitely bitter. An alarming 70% assimilation rate, the rising trend of children off the derech, the skyrocketing rate of children born with birth defects is beyond anything we can explain.

How can we heal? Rav Tzvi Meir Zilberberg points out that the root of all exiles began with the sin of the spies. "Visinat Hashem otonu." Klal Yisrael said, Hashem brought us here to this desert because He hates us. Wherever life has taken you, if your response is that Hashem hates you and that's why you're here, then you've totally missed the boat. Hashem created the world so we could draw close to Him. When we suffer its for us to say – It's not the externals of life, my expectations or my will to control; it's my desire for things to be good that's driving me. Open the gates,

Hashem.

The first step we have to do is increase our ahavat Hashem. The simplest way is through gratitude, not to just fleetingly feel it, but to talk it out. When you get up in the morning you can thank Hashem for giving you a day of life, for your senses and your ability to function. Hashem creates a backdrop and you can make choices and attain spirituality wherever you are. Besides all the physical things Hashem gives you, you're Jewish and living a life that's beautiful. Gratitude changes your relationship towards living. If you see everything coming to you as an expression of His love, you're going to respond with love. This includes people you encounter. If you love Hashem, you're going to say -This is one of His people, let's see what can I teach him and what he can teach me. That's the first lesson of this time period.

The second lesson which is directly related, is loving your fellow Jew. Ahavat chinam doesn't appear anywhere in chazal. Don't love people for no reason. Look what there is to love in the people you encounter and you'll find it. I was reading a story about Rabbi David Trenk. He went to get a coffee in a gas station and he saw a threatening six foot guy with tattoos all over him, sporting a Magen David. You could say- What a disgrace, who could believe this person is Jewish. Or you could say- Look at that Jewish star, a Jewish heart beats under his skin, I love him because he's one of us. Although these two approaches are very different, they both sound authentic and the nisayon is to discern what is really true.

Let's briefly go through the laws of ahavas Yisrael. First, speak well of your fellow Jew. When there's something good to say, say it to them. It makes a person aware of who they are which brings forth their desire to be better. Second, give respect to people. This means taking them seriously and really listening to them. The society we live in trains us to be

phony which is sad. Third, try to protect people from loss. If you see someone dropped something, don't just ignore it, try to figure out how you could return it.

The fourth point is tefilah. Tefilah is a way of expressing our absolute dependence on Hashem. Throughout history there were many attempts to end the exile such as secular Zionism and various other assimilationist movements. It never worked. Tell Hashem -I'm dependent on You, we don't like it as it is, it's not good for us, we want to draw close to You. So many times throughout the day we recall our longing for the redemption, not just in shemonei esrei, but also in birchat hamazon. Recognize that all of the travail is coming from one source which is the estrangement of exile. Exile means being apart, not just from Hashem but from your identity, your higher self. Use this period of Bein Hametzorim for tefilah. Have extra kavanah in the tefilot you are saying anyway.

It's permitted during the Three Weeks to say Tikkun Chatzot at midday and it's divided in two segments, Tikkun Rachel and Tikkun Leah. Tikkun Rachel is about the pain. Even if you can't say the entire tikkun at least express the pain. The problem we have is that although we understand personal pain, we don't understand collective pain. It's very hard to feel the loss of something you never had. We have no concept of the bet hamikdash, of being truly forgivable, of being beloved, of being a light, a star in the heavens, not only as a people but as an individual. We should at least give it some thought, what we had and what could be. One of the names of the bet hamikdash was levanon which means white. You went in burdened with sin and came out pure. This is a good time to learn about the bet hamikdash, what it looked like and what it meant to us, to have some appreciation of what life would be if we were forgiven and close to Hashem and truly loved each other.