

# ***PENINIM ON THE TORAH***

## **PARSHA BOOKLET**

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### **PARASHAT MASSEI**

*For he must dwell in his city of refuge until the death of the Kohen Gadol. (35:28)*

One who had inadvertently killed a fellow Jew was required to flee to one of the Arei Miklat, Cities of Refuge, to seek protection from the anger and vengeance of the go'el ha'dam, avenger of the blood, a relative who had the right to kill the murderer to avenge the blood of a loved one. While it served as a refuge for the murderer, the exile was also a punishment which mandated him to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the Kohen Gadol. In explaining this halachah, Rashi quotes the Talmud Makkos 11a, which teaches us that it was the Kohen Gadol's responsibility to pray for Klal Yisrael, so that such tragedies will not occur. Since this murder did take place, albeit unpremeditated, the Kohen Gadol is held responsible to a certain extent.

Because Hashem determines the lifespan of the Kohen Gadol, there were significant variations in the length of the sentence. One person might have been released after a short stay, while another may have had a lengthy residence in the city of refuge. In noting the disparity among sentences, the Sforno explains that many different factors play a role in an unintentional killing. Bais Din is not privy to these factors and were, thus, at a loss to determine the correct and exact punishment that should be given to the defendant. Clearly, some unintentional circumstances border on the accidental, while others are almost certainly negligence. Therefore, the length of exile of each killer is left to an act of G-d, the death of the Kohen Gadol, which is Hashem's way of indicating the veracity of the defendant's lack of premeditation.

We can imagine that the killers who resided in the Arei Miklat understood that their freedom was contingent upon the Kohen Gadol's lifespan. This might lead them to hope and even pray that he pass on to his eternal rest at the soonest possible time. Chazal teach us that to circumvent this problem, the mothers of the Kohanim Gedolim would supply food and drink in abundance, so that the killer would be content in his new home and not pray for the Kohen Gadol's premature demise.

This observation regarding the maintenance of the needs of the murderers provides us with a powerful lesson concerning the power and efficacy of prayer. Horav Avraham Pam, zl, in his anthology of Torah thoughts authored by Rabbi Sholom Smith, cites the Alter, zl, m'Kelm, who notes the distinction between the one who is praying and the one about whom he is praying. The Kohen Gadol was usually the individual who had achieved an elevated, if not the most exalted, spiritual plateau in Klal Yisrael. He carried the problems and needs of the entire nation on his shoulders and in his heart. He would enter the Kodoshhei Hakodoshim, Holy of Holies, on Yom Kippur in order to entreat Hashem

on behalf of the Jewish People. As the individual empowered to ask for their forgiveness, he was certainly a special and holy individual. Let us turn to look at the other end of the spectrum: the unintentional murderer. He could have been a fine, upstanding member of the community, but let's face it: What kind of person would pray for the premature death of the Kohen Gadol? Is that not selfishness at its nadir? Why pray for a tzaddik, righteous person, to die just so that one can leave the Arei Miklat early? Indeed, why would Hashem listen and respond to such a person's selfish prayer?

The Alter explains that the exiles were in a unique position for understanding that their release was dependent upon one - and only one- source: Hashem. While we all know this, the exiles felt it! Therefore, their prayers emanated from the deepest recesses of their hearts, with a sincerity, integrity and resolute conviction that only Hashem could help them. Such prayers have a power unlike any other. They can pierce the Heavens and achieve unusual and unprecedented efficacy. Yes, the mothers of the Kohanim Gedolim had much to fear from the exiles' prayers. They prayed like there was no other recourse. Such a prayer is not contingent upon the individual who is praying or for what he is praying for. It is the prayer itself that counts.

Selfish tefillos, prayers, may not be the most appropriate way to communicate with Hashem, but their effectiveness is not to be ignored. The essence is sincerity in prayer and belief in what one is doing. All too often, we also pray to Hashem. This means that we resort to all means of hishtadlus, endeavoring, and "just in case" our hishtadlus does not work, we pray to Hashem. Regrettably, this indicates exactly where on the "totem pole" we place prayer. The exile knows that there is no other recourse but Hashem. This is why his prayer is so powerful. It is sincere.

Does one have to be a righteous and pious person to pray effectively? No. Certainly, the "members" of the city of refuge community were not. They were there because it was their escape. Rav Pam cites the Talmud in Shabbos 67a, which offers the following insight. If a person has a tree that sheds its fruit prematurely before they ripen, he will sustain a major financial loss. What should he do to prevent this loss? Chazal suggest that he dye the tree with red paint to call attention to it. This way, when passersby see the tree, they will recognize the owner's plight and pray that Hashem have mercy on him and that his tree will retain its fruit a bit longer.

This was a normal occurrence that was expected of ordinary people. They were to feel the pain of the owner, who was probably a total stranger to them, and pray for him. We are not talking about a tzaddik. We are not talking about a child that is chas v'shalom ill. We are talking about a tree! Yet, Jews have sensitive feelings within their psyche, such that when they see a red-dyed tree, they will pray for its owner - even if they have no clue who he is! Moreover, such behavior was expected of the average Jew! It was not the exclusive domain of the righteous. It was an "everyone" thing!

In his inimitable manner, Rav Pam addresses the present and the way people act in regard to the needs of others. We walk by a bulletin board in shul, and we see the name of a person for whom we should recite Tehillim. We see an ad in the paper to say Tehillim. We hear of a Jew who is ill and in need of Heavenly intervention. These are all common everyday scenarios. How do we respond to these circumstances? If it is someone we know personally or with whose relatives we are acquainted, we will daven, pray, for them. If the name means absolutely nothing to us, however, chances are that we will ignore the request for prayers. Why? Where is our sensitivity? Where is our empathy? Where is our caring?

Likewise, when one sees the flashing lights or hears the siren of a hatzolah vehicle racing to an emergency, does it immediately evoke within us a sense of achrayus, responsibility, to pray? These devoted volunteers take off time and energy to help other Jews. Are we at least prepared to pray for the

individual in need, or is that beyond our scope of responsibility? After all, we do not really know the person. As we learned from the Talmud, praying for the person is not considered an extraordinary act. It is the appropriate response!

Horav Yitzchak Izik Sher, zl, was visiting America, and he was asked to deliver one of his famous shmuessen, ethical discourses, to a group of elderly rabbis. Shortly before Rosh Hashanah, Rav Aizik rose to the lectern, posing the following question to them: "My friends, the Yom haDin, Day of Judgement, is quickly approaching. Do you have reason to be concerned? After all, you are all deeply observant. You observe Shabbos, kashrus, you are honest, you do not speak lashon hora, slanderous speech. You give tzedakah. What are you worried about? You lead lives of virtue."

After a lengthy discourse, Rav Aizik came to his point: "Gentlemen, you are all fine Jews, and you do not sin. Yet, you are able to pick up the New York Times in the morning and read that a man was killed, yet you continue to drink your coffee. How can you drink your coffee when you have read that a woman has become a widow and that children have lost their father? You should faint in anguish, but you do not. Why? Because you do not care how that death affects other people. Therefore, fear the Yom haDin, because the Ribbono Shel Olam is more stringent with tzaddikim, the righteous, than He is with common people. On Yom HaDin, you must all be careful, because this grievance applies to everyone!" Powerful words. What should we say?

The Rosh Yeshivah notes that we always read Parashas Masei on the Shabbos before Rosh Chodesh. Rosh Chodesh Av marks the beginning of the tragic nine days which conclude with Tisha B'Av. It is a time when all Jews should be especially sensitive to the needs of all of their brothers and sisters, to pray for them that Hashem alleviate their pain and troubles. With this merit of brotherly sensitivity, Hashem will finally transform Tisha B'Av, with the advent of Moshiach Tzidkeinu, into a festival of joy.

*They traveled from Marah and came to Eilim, and in Eilim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palms. (33:9)*

When you think about it, seventy palm trees and a few springs of water do not comprise a tremendous amount of nourishment, enough to sustain a nation the size of Klal Yisrael. Why then does the Torah emphasize the features of Eilim? One would think that the Torah is distinguishing between Marah, where the water was bitter and Eilim whose food was plentiful. It is not, however, so. The Baal Shem Tov Hakadosh explains that actually the water in Marah was not bitter. Rather, it was the people who were bitter. Their negativity and sense of dejection are what gave the water a bitter after-taste. When someone is down, if everything he looks at he views through a lens of bitterness, then everything he sees and tastes will smack of rancor. When "Vayisu miMarah," they traveled away from Marah; when they experienced a release from their bitterness, they were able to accept the features of Eilim, whatever it may have been, and they appreciated it.

It happens all of the time. A person is unhappy with his personal life. He is plagued by issues which are not being resolved quickly enough, and he becomes depressed. It suddenly becomes everybody's fault - especially G-d's. The first institution that becomes a punching bag is religion. I recently had occasion to meet a young man who, in the short span of one hour, spewed forth a venom against everything religious - beginning with rabbis and concluding with Hashem. After virtually denying the validity of the Torah and the veracity of the mitzvos, he finally intimated that he was angry

because of a personal situation that was making his life miserable. After sharing his problem with me and releasing the burden that had been weighing him down, he conceded that he did not really believe all of the negative statements he was making. He was miserable, and this was his reaction to his misery. After all, he had to blame someone.

How does one deal with such a problem? Vayisu miMarah - travel away from Marah. Separate yourself from the issue. Do not let the bitterness become a part of you. No one is denying that there are bitter situations, but one should not let the bitterness envelop him and take control of his life. By distancing oneself from the problem, thereby allowing for an objective approach, he will invariably be able to view the situation more realistically and without prejudice.

Happiness plays a pivotal role in mitzvah observance. An unhappy person is rarely a happy Jew. Accordingly, an unhappy Jew is likely to be deficient in his shemiras ha'mitzvos, mitzvah observance. A person who has a jaundiced perspective on life has a difficult time maintaining relationships. Unhappy with himself, he has little tolerance for others. After awhile, he even begins to search for faults in others. Young people who are unhappy tend to be less forgiving of their parents and teachers or of any individual who might serve as a role model for them. This, of course, causes a negative feeling toward the Yiddishkeit these role models represent. All too often these same individuals place their focus on the young person's attitude toward religion, while ignoring the real reason for their discontent - themselves.

Of course, this does not mean that the problem is always within the person. Quite often, parents or teachers can--and do--err. When mentors demonstrate love and sensitivity towards their charges, they set the tone for emotional security, which is intrinsic to emotional well-being. When mentors act thoughtlessly, or if their exalted ego interferes with their common sense, the student is sacrificed.

Moreover, when children are taught to believe that frum people are happy, and when someone is not happy, it is due to his lack of observance, the child may begin to question Judaism's effectiveness when he sees an observant person in pain. This will cause him to lose faith in Judaism and its disseminators. One must be taught that Judaism gives us a certain perspective on life, one that adds depth and meaning. It does not create happiness when it has to overcome one's unhealthy emotional depression. Torah teaches us how to cope with the problems, how to deal with the issues as it engenders hope and increases faith.

*Because he must remain in his city of refuge, until the death of the Kohen Gadol. (36:28)*

Rashi explains that the release of the one who commits an act of inadvertent manslaughter is dependent upon the death of the Kohen Gadol, because the Kohen Gadol regrettably shares some of the responsibility of this tragedy. He should have prayed that such a mishap not occur during his tenure. It seems a bit much to expect that a person be blamed for the sins of these inadvertent murderers--just because he did not pray that they not sin. This seems a bit unrealistic. That his death be the subject of their prayers seems to be an excessive punishment.

Yet, we find a similar halachah with regard to the Eglah Arufah, the calf whose neck is broken as part of the ritual carried out when a corpse is found with no known assailant. At the end of the procedure, the zekeinim, elders, declare, "Yadeinu lo shafchah es ha'dam ha'zeh," "our hands have not shed this blood." What did they - or did they not-- do that places such culpability upon them?

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, explains that the spiritual leadership has the ability to create an environment that is spiritually correct, whereby there is a spirit of respect and mutual cooperation among the populace. They can and should entreat Hashem's Divine assistance, so that brotherhood and tranquility reign in their community in order that such tragedies that send the unintentional murderer to the city of refuge, will be averted. The mere fact that such a tragic occurrence has taken place during their "watch" reflects poorly upon their leadership in creating a mood of calm and peace. The Kohen Gadol did no wrong, but he should have prayed that others also not do wrong. The welfare of the people of his generation is his responsibility.

I must add that this responsibility does not apply only to the Kohen Gadol. It applies to all of us. Each and every one of us has a moral obligation to pray for the welfare and peace of our community. Our success will correspond with our input.

Since we have come this far, I think we might tread a bit further and address the responsibility we all have towards our less observant and non-observant brethren. While there are many outreach professionals working tirelessly to reach out to the unaffiliated, regrettably there are still so many unaffiliated Jews who are just waiting for the opportunity to be invited to return home. Each of us knows a nonobservant neighbor, coworker, or relative. Rather than wait for them to contact an outreach organization, why do we not personally reach out to them?

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, exhorted the observant community to "maaser," take a tithe, of their time and use it for kiruv, outreach. Fifty years earlier, the Chafetz Chaim, zl, emphasized the need and obligation for frum, observant, Jews to reach out to their non-observant brethren. We are one people with one destiny, each of us responsible for one another. By burying our collective heads in the ground and attempting to ignore the problem, we are adding to the flames of assimilation that are destroying so many of our brethren. On the other hand, if we own up to our responsibility, we can turn the tide and impact the future of our nation.

*These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael. (33:1)*

The Torah summarizes Klal Yisrael's route through the wilderness. Why are these forty-two encampments emphasized in the Torah? Chazal teach us that it is a form of appreciation, a reward for the way in which they greeted the Jewish wanderers. Hashem will one day reward the wilderness for its magnanimity. Now it is dry and desolate, but in the future it will be transformed into an oasis and a habitat for people. Man is to derive a kal v'chomer, an "a priori" argument, from this. If the wilderness, which is inanimate, is rewarded by Hashem for "extending itself," how much more so will Hashem reimburse he who offers his home and possessions in the service of another person?

Furthermore, the wilderness had no "intention" of offering assistance. It just happened to be there. Yet, its reward is emphasized because ultimately it provided a necessary service. How much more so will there be a reward in store for he who intentionally extends himself on behalf of another Jew.

In the Talmud Megillah 14b, Chazal note that eight Neviim descended from Rachav. Now, let us understand; Rachav was a pagan whose vocation was one of ill-repute. Yet, she ultimately converted, married Yehoshua, the leader of Klal Yisrael, and merited such distinguished offspring! Why? What was her zchus, merit? The Alter, zl, m'Kelm explains that she had one zchus that catalyzed this entire

reward. She had extended herself to two strangers and concealed them in her attic. Her actions helped Klal Yisrael. One chesed - one act of kindness - one time helping someone in need - one time protecting someone - one time providing sanctuary for a person. That is all it takes - one time.

These are the names of the men: for the tribe of Yehudah, Calev ben Yefuneh; for the tribe of Shimon, Shmuel ben Amihud. For the tribe of Binyamin, Elidad ben Kislou. (34:19,20,21)

Interestingly, these three tribes - Yehudah, Shimon and Binyamin - do not have the position of Nasi preceding the individual's name, as we note concerning the remaining tribes. The Ohr Ha'Chaim Ha'kadosh cites Rabbeinu Nissim, who explains that Yehudah did not need this designation, since Calev was well-known as its Nasi. Due to the grave sin committed by Zimri, the Nasi of Shimon, its leader lost his title of honor. Binyamin's Nasi was Eldad, who had earlier achieved Navi, prophet, status, a position more distinguished than Nasi.

The Meor va'Shemesh suggests that by this omission, the Torah is teaching us an important principle. One who acts l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven, never loses out. It may seem momentarily that he loses money, or even honor. Ultimately, however, he will get it all back.

The Zohar Hakadosh explains that the Meraglim, spies, disparaged Eretz Yisrael, because they knew that as soon as they entered the Land, they would no longer be Nesiim. Thus, they wanted to extend their sojourn in the wilderness. Calev ben Yefuneh was not concerned with his kavod, honor, and spoke the truth about the land. Likewise, Eldad prophesized concerning Yehoshua leading the nation into Eretz Yisrael. They did not concern themselves with the possibility of losing their present distinguished status. They cared about what was correct, proper and kavod Shomayim, the honor of Heaven. If this meant relinquishing their positions as Nasi - so be it. Hashem rewarded them by not having the word, Nasi, precede their name. This indicates that each was selected as a Nasi, specifically because he rejected the honor of being a Nasi. One who runs away from honor, will merit that the honor he avoids will chase after him.

*You shall designate cities for yourselves... and a murderer shall flee there - one who takes a life unintentionally. (35:11)*

The Alter, zl, m'Kelm derives that the mitzvah of creating a haven for the unintentional murderer demonstrates that the Torah is sensitive to the needs of all people - even those who take a human life. Indeed, Moshe Rabbeinu was acutely aware that the three Arei Miklat, Cities of Refuge, that were situated on the Ever HaYarden did not go into effect until the three in Eretz Yisrael were designated. Yet, he did not tarry, but immediately designated the Arei Miklat of Ever HaYarden. Even a murderer must be treated as a human being. While this is especially true of the unintentional murderer, Chazal teach us that even a rotzeach b'mezid, intentional murderer, must be given every chance to be found innocent. How different it is today, when a person is derided at his slightest deviation from Jewish observance, and not given a chance to return to correct his sin.

The following story was related by someone who was directly involved with the secular Zionist movement in Eretz Yisrael. In the early nineteen-twenties, struggle raged between the secular Zionist organization and the right-wing faction of the Agudath Israel, led by the venerable sage, Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl. One of the Zionist leaders, infamous for his virulent attacks both on the religious community in general and Rav Yosef Chaim in particular, suddenly fell critically ill. After being hospitalized in the English Missionary Hospital, his condition deteriorated, and hope for his recovery

was, at best, slim. Knowing that the finest doctors in the country practiced at the Shaarei Tzedek Hospital, the family of the patient sought to have him moved there.

A move such as this was easier said than done. The Bais Din of Yerushalayim had placed a cheirem, ban, on entering the Missionary Hospital. Therefore, Dr. Wallach, chief administrator of Shaarei Tzedek, would probably not permit this patient access to Shaarei Tzedek. The decision to transfer the patient was made. Dr. Wallach met the patient and his family in the emergency room and, upon discovering that the patient was being transferred from the Missionary Hospital, stalked out of the room. It seemed almost certain that he would refuse to admit the patient.

The family quickly deliberated and decided to send the person who was relating this story to Rav Yosef Chaim. This individual, although presently a staunch secularist, had originally been raised in the home of one of Yerushalayim's most distinguished Torah scholars. The individual had himself once been very close with Rav Yosef Chaim. Alas, the winds of change had swept him away. He ran as fast as he could to the home of Rav Yosef Chaim. On the way, a terrific thunderstorm struck, and he arrived there thoroughly drenched and cold.

He entered the house to find Rav Yosef Chaim immersed in a large volume of Talmud. Nervous that Rav Yosef Chaim might berate him for forsaking his upbringing and turning his back on religion, he was quite surprised to be greeted with a warm, friendly smile. He apologized for the interruption and explained the seriousness of the predicament. Rav Yosef Chaim listened intently and immediately closed the Talmud, donned his fur coat, and prepared to leave for the hospital. The emissary said, "Rebbe, the weather outside is treacherous. I only want a letter asking Dr. Wallach to provide medical attention. I have no wish for the Rav to go outside."

Rav Yosef Chaim's response was emphatic: "When a Jewish life is in danger, a letter is insufficient. I must personally attend to fulfilling this great mitzvah. A letter might help. I will not, however, leave the hospital until the patient is admitted!"

With these words, Rav Yosef Chaim dashed out into the torrential downpour to save a Jewish life. At the Jaffa Gate, they boarded a carriage and asked the driver to get them to the hospital as fast as possible. During this time, Rav Yosef Chaim's face glowed as he quietly recited pesukim from Sefer Tehillim on behalf of the patient. As soon as the carriage pulled up to the hospital, Rav Yosef Chaim sprang from it and ran directly to Dr. Wallach's office.

"Since when is a doctor a halachic authority with regard to human life?" asked Rav Yosef Chaim. "Immediately admit this patient! A Jewish life is at risk."

Two weeks later, the patient, now fully recovered, was released from the hospital. Knowing that the relationship between the patient and Rav Yosef Chaim was, at best, very tense, the family refrained from telling him who it was that had intervened on his behalf and had been indirectly responsible for his recovery.

One year later, as the patient returned to his position in promoting the aims of secular Zionism, while denigrating the position of Orthodoxy, he was asked to be the keynote speaker at a groundbreaking ceremony for a new settlement in the Galilee. Speaking eloquently of the lofty goals of his group, his closing words were a jab at Agudath Israel, "We will build this land in our own way with our own strength! We will build this land by waging a battle to the death against the black arm of Rabbi Sonnenfeld and his cronies!"

The one who related this story, who had originally been instrumental in bringing in Rav Yosef Chaim to save the speaker, was in the audience. Hearing these vilifying words and knowing the truth

about Rav Yosef Chaim, he jumped up and ran towards the podium, "How dare you speak so disparagingly! Have a little respect for the saintly rabbi to whom you owe your very life!" he declared.

The speaker was shocked into silence and immediately asked for an explanation. The explanation came forth as a public announcement, as the young man who had by now regretted ever having left the Torah camp, strode to the podium and explained to the assemblage exactly how the "black arm" of Rav Yosef Chaim had interceded to save the life of the individual who had just vowed to destroy him.

*You shall designate cities for yourselves, Cities of Refuge shall they be for you, and a murderer shall flee there - one who takes a life unintentionally. (35:11)*

Not every unintentional murderer was permitted to seek sanctuary in the Arei Miklat, Cities of Refuge. Chazal explain that there are three cases to which the term unintentional murderer may be subscribed: A) Accident, whereby the perpetrator is blameless; B) Unintentional, but with a certain degree of carelessness - the perpetrator is exiled to a City of Refuge; C) Unintentional, but where circumstances are such that although there is a high degree of negligence, the bais din cannot consider it intentional. In such a case, the perpetrator is not exiled, since the sin is too great to be absolved by exile. Only the bais din has the authority to determine the degree of "unintentional" and until, that time, the go'el ha'dam, avenger of the blood, a close relative of the victim, may kill the perpetrator. In the event that it has been determined that there was a prevalent degree of negligence, and, consequently, the perpetrator is not to be exiled, in the event that he were to flee to the City of Refuge, the go'el ha'dam may kill him even there.

The aveirah, sin, of killing b'shogeg, unintentionally, is underscored by the fact that misasek, an unwitting act, is not considered a reason for exemption regarding murder, even though concerning all other areas of halachah, a misasek is patur, exempt. For instance, if a person has set out to cut a vegetable that had already been picked and his hand slipped, causing him to cut another vegetable that was still growing, he is exempt. One who is chopping trees in a place where people are usually to be found, but he had no clue that anyone was in the vicinity, and the axe handle flew off and struck and killed someone - he goes into exile. He should have been more careful. Human life is sacrosanct. One must take the greatest care to prevent any tragedy.

There is another aspect concerning taking a human life which underscores its significance - the form of penance. Desecrating Shabbos unintentionally carries with it the punishment of a Korban Chatas, Sin-Offering. This seems to be a fairly inexpensive form of atonement, especially compared to the unintentional murderer, who is exiled sometimes for many years. His entire life comes to a standstill, as he must change and give up everything and flee for his life. He can never leave until the Kohen Gadol dies. If he leaves prematurely, he may be killed by the go'el ha'dam, and, according to one position in Chazal, anyone is permitted to avenge the death of the victim.

Horav Avigdor Halevi Nebenzhal, Shlita, takes this point further. Imagine, one is driving along, talking on his cell phone, and, because he is engrossed in the conversation, he does not notice the young child that has wandered into the path of his car. This is a clear case of misasek. It is as unwitting as one can get. According to the Torah, however, he must go into exile. He took a life unintentionally, unwittingly - but there is a victim, and someone must take responsibility.

Let us go a bit further. If one were to throw a stone into a public place and no one was hurt, has

the perpetrator transgressed a mitzvah of the Torah? Certainly. He had not been careful regarding human life. Luckily, Hashem had taken pity on him and had not permitted the stone to strike anyone and inflict damage. In a way, this person is worse off than he who is exiled. At least the one who is exiled has the opportunity to repent the consequences of his actions. He sees what has resulted from his unwitting act. Rav Nebenzhal wonders how we should react to the individual who brags about how fast he had driven his car and almost had an accident. Baruch Hashem, no tragedy occurred. Is that it? Something certainly happened! He played with human life. He could have been hurt, or he could have hurt others! This is a case of rotzeach b'koach, potential murderer. He could have, but he did not - by the grace of the Almighty. What is he going to do about it? Teshuvah? Regrettably, not. It usually goes on until someone is hurt.

Interestingly, at a meeting in the Har Nof community of Yerushalayim, the residents complained to their rav regarding those individuals whose reckless driving was endangering them and the general population. The following decision, with the encouragement of the rav and Rav Nebentzhal, was proposed. A bais din should be designated to listen and validate these complaints. The driver must be warned and taken to task. If this does not help, then the driver should not be given an aliyah, called to the Torah; he should not be permitted to be a shliach tzibur, lead the services; he should be placed in cheirem, a ban of excommunication leveled against him whereby he is not counted in a Minyan, quorum, nor will anyone do business with him. Rav Nebenzhal added that it is permitted to release the air from his tires, if it is confirmed and documented that he is a habitual reckless driver.

There is another point that should be addressed, one that quite possibly is more serious and, regrettably, more common. Chazal tell us that one who causes the spiritual demise of another Jew by leading him to sin, or, if I may add, by turning him off to Yiddishkeit, is worse than a murderer, who takes his physical life. The life of the spirit extends to this world and the next. The physical realm is only in this world. If this is the case, we should ask ourselves, how often are we guilty of causing another Jew to sin? Bitul Torah, causing another Jew to waste time from Torah study, is also an aveirah, a sin of epic proportion. Furthermore, while it is very difficult to calculate the loss created by taking someone's life, can we even begin to imagine the incredible loss incurred in Olam Habah, the World to Come, for one who has deviated from the Torah way?

It does not take much. We are not talking about blatant incitement to sin - just simply situations in which our thoughtlessness creates a situation which might unwittingly have a negative influence on another Jew. It is mind-boggling how often we might cause bitul Torah, unknowingly, and certainly, unintentionally. Take a simple case of removing a sefer from its proper place in the bais ha'medrash and neglecting to return it. This causes bitul Torah. Is it any different than speeding down a city street?

*The three cities shall you designate on the (other) side of the Yarden, and three cities shall you designate in the Land of Canaan; they shall be cities of refuge. (35:14)*

Rashi cites Chazal in the Talmud Makos 9a, who note that the number of Cities of Refuge in Ever haYarden was disproportionate to the number of residents. On the other side of the Yarden there were only two and one-half tribes, in contrast to the nine tribes that lived in Eretz Yisrael. Chazal explain that in Gilaad, which was in Ever haYarden, there were many killers. Ramban adds that although the Cities of Refuge were specifically for unintentional murderers, nonetheless, since there was a high incidence of intentional murder, it stands to reason that these murderers would attempt to conceal their malevolence by making their actions appear to be inadvertent. Alternatively, the Maharal

explains that the mere fact that there were many intentional murderers in Gilaad indicates that there was a low regard for the value of human life. It, therefore, follows that those who were not murderers, simply tended to be negligent. Thus, there were many preventable, unintentionable killings in the area of Ever haYarden.

The environment in which one finds himself plays a compelling role in his spiritual progress. A good environment creates a positive spiritual field in which one can grow in his relationship with Hashem. In contrast, an atmosphere that is spiritually decadent will harm one's neshamah, soul. One would think that the effect of the environment is commensurate with one's direct involvement with its members and relative to his firsthand exposure to its endeavors. We derive here from the Maharal's explanation that the influence of the environment goes much deeper and is much more infectious and far-reaching than we assume. The mere fact that killers live in a city diminishes the value of human life. One becomes aware that murder is not frowned upon as much in this community, since murderers are included among its citizenry. The individual slowly becomes desensitized to the sanctity and primacy of human life. Hence, an act of unintentional murder is something that does not affect him as much as it should. This catalyzes an increase in bloodshed.

We live in a society where integrity is a medieval value, in which morality is archaic, where secular leadership, both communal and political, has redefined the meaning of ethicality and virtue. Does this not in some way impact our own thought process? The only way to counteract this influence is through awareness and insulation. Prevention is the best antidote for the influence of the environment.

*He shall dwell in it until the death of the Kohen gadol. (35:25)*

The Kohen Gadol carries some of the onus regarding the fatal accidents that occur during his watch, since he should have prayed that these accidents not occur during his tenure. Sforno explains that since there were varied forms of unintentional killings, it was almost impossible for the earthly court to determine the length of time for each individual killer's sentence of exile. Thus, it is left up to Hashem to render His judgment through the medium of an event ordained only by Him.

The responsibility of the gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders, of each generation to pray for the members of their generation is awesome. Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, took this responsibility very seriously, as evidenced in the following narrative. One of the young men in Ponevez, himself a child of Holocaust survivors, had a son. It did not take long before it was discovered that the infant suffered from a serious disease that plagued one of his internal organs. The parents practically lived in doctors' offices, as they went from specialist to specialist seeking whatever medical advice they could. It was during 1970 that the child went through his most difficult period. The child had to undergo a serious surgical procedure in America. The entire Ponevez yeshivah, including the Rosh Hayeshivah, Rav Shach, recited Tehillim in his zchus, merit.

Indeed, the joy was palpable throughout the yeshivah when the good news of a successful surgery arrived. Rav Shach was among those who were overjoyed for the family. He added that he would continue to recite Tehillim for the child.

"Why?" the parents asked. "Baruch Hashem, the result is positive."

"Yes, I know," he replied. "I still would like to be the shomer, watchman, that everything

continues to be fine."

A number of years later, the child had grown up and was now in the parshah of Shidduchim, looking for a mate with whom to share the rest of his life. The parents spoke to the intended girl's parents and encouraged them to check out the surgery that their son had received years earlier, so that everything would be clearly revealed. They suggested that besides the medical records, the parents should seek the advice of a gadol, Torah leader.

They went to Rav Shach, who, after inquiring concerning the young man's health, wished them all the best, Mazel Tov, and the young couple should merit to build a beautiful home in Yisrael amid much joy and success.

Nonetheless, the young man was not always in pure health. As Rav Shach had blessed them, they had a wonderful marriage, raising children who were bright and accomplished. The people of the neighborhood could see that this family was the beneficiary of an exceptional blessing. The father, who was Rav Shach's talmid, student, was concerned about his son's health, but nevertheless he did not worry obsessively, because of his deep abiding faith in Hashem.

Everything was fine until Mar Cheshvon 16, 2002, when the venerable Rosh Hayeshivah, Rav Shach, passed away. The father was acutely aware that Rav Shach's passing would affect his son. He knew that ever since that fateful day of his surgery, the Rosh Hayeshivah had recited Tehillim daily for his son. After all, he said he would be his shomer. Now, he was gone. Shortly thereafter, the father's terrible fear was realized, as his son suddenly took ill and passed away. The shomer ne'eman, true watchman, the Rosh Hayeshivah who was so devoted to Klal Yisrael, was no longer there to intercede in his behalf.

While this thesis is about gedolei Yisrael and their responsibility to pray for the community, as parents we cannot forget our own obligation to pray for our children - and, as we age, for our grandchildren. A parent certainly prays for their child's health and success, both spiritually and materially. I feel that to the degree a parent values his child's success in the spiritual arena, to that end he will supplicate the Almighty. The Tehillim recited and the t'reren, tears, shed by a parent, make the difference. Above all, the child senses that the value system in his home is unique. Ruchnius, spirituality, plays a starring role in the character of the home. The following incredible story, cited by Rabbi Yechiel Spero in *Touched by a Story 2*, demonstrates a mother's prayer and the enduring effect it had on her illustrious son.

Rabbi Moshe Sherer, zl, was the Torah askan, communal worker, par excellence. As president of Agudath Israel, he was the major spokesman for Orthodox Jewry for over fifty years. His total subservience to the gedolei Yisrael was legendary. It did not happen overnight. He hailed from a home whose hallmarks were Torah commitment; trust in gedolei Yisrael; and emunah peshutah, unequivocal faith in Hashem. Whenever one of the Sherer children were ill, his mother would immediately visit the Stoliner Rebbe, zl, to ask for his blessing. His response was that she should light another Shabbos candle. She had a large family, and the ailments were typical. One could imagine that her Shabbos candle-lighting was a major endeavor.

There was another aspect of Mrs. Sherer's candle-lighting that was special. Young Moshe Sherer would silently observe his mother stand there and weep softly, as she entreated Hashem on behalf of her family. What did she say, he would wonder? Why did the candle-lighting take so long? One Friday evening, determined to find an answer to his pressing questions, he hid beneath the table on which the candles were placed. Once and for all, he was going to know what his mother was saying.

What he heard is something that remained with him - and serves as a lesson for each of us.

Since he could not fit his entire body within the cramped space beneath the table, his hands were left sticking out. His mother did not notice his hands as she approached the table to begin her weekly ritual. She recited the brachah, blessing, and accompanying prayer. She then added her own Tefillah: Ribbono Shel Olam, Baleichten zolst du di oigen fun meina kinderlach in Dein heilige Torah. "Please, Hashem, light up my children's eyes through the precious words of Your holy Torah. Please allow them to perceive the light of Your holy Torah."

These words were spoken over and over, as she wept with total devotion. Moshe was mesmerized by what he heard. His reverie broke as one of his mother's warm tears landed in the palm of his outstretched hand. He never forgot the feeling or the impact of that warm teardrop. The teardrop wove its way into his heart and mind, as that moment left an indelible impression on him for life.

The Kohen Gadol feels a kinship to all Jews. A parent certainly feels an unabiding love for their child. Perhaps, if we all would begin to pray for others, Hashem would listen to us when we pray for ourselves.

*These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael, who went forth from the land of Egypt. (33:1)*

We must keep on going forward - not lingering in the past. While we must never forget the past, it is incumbent upon us to look forward to the future. We have left Egypt; the pain, persecution and travail are behind us. We go forward towards new horizons. When we live in the past, we become depressed and stagnant. The Lomza Rosh Hayeshivah, Horav Yechiel Mordechai Gordon, zl, would walk through the streets of Petach Tikvah with an air of nobility and dignity which bespoke a person who seemed not to have a care in the world. He spoke and acted with serenity and refinement. There were only a few very close talmidim, students, and friends who knew how deeply troubled and anguished Rav Yechiel Mordechai really was. He had lost two wives, and two of his sons had been killed. Thousands of his students had perished in the fires of the Holocaust, and his precious yeshivah was destroyed by the Nazis. His face never evinced his pain; his mouth never uttered a depressed word. He consoled others, giving them hope amid their pain. He always kept on going forward. He left Egypt/ the decimation of European Jewry. He was rebuilding a Torah renaissance in Eretz Yisrael.

Once, he gave into his emotions. It was a slip - a painful reference to his overwhelming losses. It happened that a survivor, an ember spared from the fires of the Holocaust, came to bemoan his fate and seek a blessing from the Rosh Hayeshivah. He had a son that had for a number of years been of marriageable age and was not succeeding in finding his barshert, designated mate. The father wept over the past, bemoaned the present, and feared what the future would bring. How does one console such a broken-hearted Jew? Rav Yechiel Mordechai shared his personal grief with him. He told him about his losses, the wonderful sons, the brilliant and precious students that he no longer had. Together, they wept - for one another and for themselves.

Another time, as he attended the funeral of a brilliant, budding Torah scholar, a student of Slabodka Yeshivah who had drowned in a lake near Tel Aviv, Rav Yechiel Mordechai also revealed his pent-up grief. As the funeral cortege proceeded from the Lomza Yeshivah, the Rosh HaYeshivah suddenly began to cry uncontrollably with bitter sobs. They could not stop him. A rav who was with him asked, "What is wrong?" Rav Yechiel Mordechai answered, "It is a terrible tragedy for a young person to be taken so suddenly in the prime of his life. Yet, there is some form of consolation in the fact

that he merits a funeral and burial in kever Yisrael, Jewish cemetery. I, regrettably, did not merit to accompany my sons to their burial."

How did the Rosh Hayeshivah do it? How was he able to suppress his emotions and control his feelings of pain and grief? What gave him the strength and fortitude to maintain his composure despite his overwhelming grief? He did not look back. He looked toward tomorrow and the hope of the geulah, redemption, that accompanies it.

*He shall dwell in it until the death of the Kohen Gadol. (35:25)*

What connection is there between the unintentional murderer and the Kohen Gadol? Rashi explains that the Kohen Gadol should have prayed to Hashem that such a tragedy in which one Jew kills another Jew, albeit unintentionally, does not occur during his tenure as Kohen Gadol. It is interesting how the Torah emphasizes that davening is not enough. One must know what to daven for. The Kohen Gadol should have prayed for the spiritual welfare of the people of his generation. Had he done so, the tragedy that occurred would have been circumvented. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, draws a powerful analogy to demonstrate this idea.

The Kaiser decided one day to visit one of his infantry battalions. The soldiers all lined up at attention to present themselves before their commander-in-chief. Their shoes were shining brightly; their uniforms were in perfect condition. They stood erect and marched in perfect cadence. They succeeded in impressing the Kaiser. As a show of gratitude, the Kaiser announced that he would grant each soldier one wish. One "astute" soldier jumped forward and declared that he had a favor to request of the Kaiser. "What would you like?" asked the Kaiser.

"My request is that the Kaiser grant me my daily meals," the soldier responded.

The other soldiers were shocked at his request. Is this what you bother the Kaiser about? It goes without saying that a soldier in the Kaiser's army who performs his duties as ordered will certainly be fed three meals a day. Even his uniform is provided by the Kaiser. Once one is a soldier, his needs are addressed because he serves the king. The "brilliant" soldier should have had the common sense to ask for something special, something unique and out of the ordinary, something that he would not receive anyway. The mere fact that he wasted such an incredible opportunity is in itself the greatest loss. He could no longer have his request granted by the king.

The Chafetz Chaim explains that this same idea applies to our daily Tefillos, prayers. Let us face it: What do we really daven for? We pray for material sustenance, material success - everything to enhance our material and physical status. Do we ever ask for Divine Assistance in performing teshuvah, repentance, or success in Torah study and yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven? Do we shed tears for our spiritual dimension, or are we so preoccupied with the mundane, the physical, the material components in our lives to focus on what is really important?

Are we different from the "foolish" soldier who asked for the food he would receive anyway as long as he served with dignity and fidelity? Should we not understand that our prayers should focus on our spiritual health and our ability to serve Hashem properly and to carry out His mitzvos correctly? Is there any doubt that if we perform properly in the spiritual arena that Hashem will provide our material needs? I guess for some people that is not enough.

*You shall designate cities for yourselves, cities of refuge... Three cities shall you designate on the other side of the Jordan. (35:11,14)*

The Torah instructs Moshe Rabbeinu to set aside three Arei Miklat, Cities of Refuge, so that the unintentional murderer will have a place to flee to protect him from the relatives of his victim. Interestingly, there were three cities of refuge on Ever haYarden, Trans-Jordan, while all of Eretz Yisrael, had only six. Imagine for two and a half tribes, three cities were established, while for nine and a half tribes, there were only six. Is this not disproportionate? In the Talmud Makos 9b Chazal note that there were an increased amount of murders in Gilaad.

Although Chazal state the reason for the number of cities in Gilaad, they do not explain why Gilaad had so many murderers. Some phenomenon prompted this flagrant disrespect for human life. Horav Avigdor HaLevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, relates that in the previous parsha Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven asked for "pens for the flock and cities for the children," placing their sheep prior to their children. This misplaced priority spawned children whose respect for each other in general and human life in particular was at a critically low plateau. When parents worry more about their material possessions than they do about their children, it is no wonder that murder becomes commonplace. Why should it not be? No one demonstrates respect for human life, so murder is a conceivable an option if the person happens to be in the way. When money takes precedence over one's children -- when the present prevails over the future -- moral perversion reigns, and human life decreases in value.

This does not in any way imply that Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven were at that time morally perverse. They had, however, a dormant moral blemish which festered and developed to the point that it later spawned generations of people to whom human life was insignificant. Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven laid the foundation from which their future offspring created a monster. How careful we must be with every aspect of our character. A slight flaw today might result in a major disaster in later generations. It happened with Shaul Hamelech. He had misplaced compassion on Amalek, and a short time later he acted with extreme cruelty against the Kohanim of Nov. We must develop integrity in character, as in everything else. A slight deviation today is likely to result in a grave infraction tomorrow.

*Aharon HaKohen went up to Har Hahar...and died there. (33:38)*

Moshe and Elazar were the only family members to be present when Aharon left this world. They were the only ones present as he was buried. Indeed, as the Midrash relates, when the people saw Moshe and Elazar coming down from the mountain alone, they queried them as to the whereabouts of Aharon. Moshe responded that he had died. A number of the usual rabble-rousers contended that this was impossible, since Aharon had previously stood up to the Angel of Death and stopped the plague that was decimating the people. They did not know that Aharon had died as a result of a kiss from Hashem, rather than by the Angel of Death directly striking him. These people had the gall to argue that Moshe had killed Aharon - out of jealousy at his popularity. Some even felt that Elazar had performed the deed, so that he could assume the Kehunah Gedolah, the High Priesthood. Moshe Rabbeinu prayed to Hashem to spare Elazar and himself from suspicion and show the people Aharon's deathbed.

His prayer was answered, and a Heavenly eulogy was then heard.

Yalkut Shimoni adds that when Miriam died, no one came to her burial. Moshe and Aharon eulogized her. Moshe ultimately exclaimed, "Woe is me! Of my entire family, I alone remain. Who will come to my funeral?" Hashem then consoled Moshe and told him that He Himself would attend to arranging his funeral.

We wonder why Klal Yisrael's greatest and most distinguished leaders did not have large funerals, in which they would be properly eulogized and appreciated. At first glance, we may suggest that individuals who attained such eminence as Moshe, Aharon and Miriam cannot be fathomed, let alone eulogized as any other mortal. They were in a league all of their own that transcended anything known to Klal Yisrael. It would take someone of their own caliber to appreciate them thoroughly. Alternatively, I feel that there is a deeper reason for this anomaly. Perhaps the greatest fear that has plagued the Jew throughout his tumultuous history, has been the fear of dying alone and not being buried in a Jewish cemetery. This has been a real fear in light of the millions of Jews who perished Al Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying Hashem's Name, in pogroms, inquisitions, holocausts, and terrorist disasters. Are we to ignore these neshamos and relegate them to obscurity? We are taught by this Midrash that when someone dies alone, he is not really alone. Hashem is with him.

Our blood soaked the soil of Europe as Jews were murdered and their bodies left in mass graves or left to rot in no graves. These Jews were not alone; Hashem buried them, just as He buried Moshe Rabbeinu. A terrorist attacks a building and thousands are buried beneath the rubble. Hashem personally buries each body. We will not find it. The person might be identified only by his DNA, but Hashem knows where the body is, and He will attend to it.

Our greatest Jewish leaders died alone. This should serve as some small consolation to those that grieve for their lost family members who did not reach kever Yisrael, Jewish burial. They did - Hashem saw to it.

*These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael. (33:1)*

In his commentary to Sefer Shemos 21:1, Rashi suggests that the word "eileh," "these," is used to reject what has previously been stated. In citing Rashi, Mayanos Ha'netzach refers to Rav Zev, a student of the Mezritcher Magid, who renders the words, "Eileh masei," "These are the journeys," homiletically. This world, *olam hazeh*, is the *olam ha'nesia*, the world of movement. We act in this world and "move on" to *Olam Habah*, the World to Come. In order for one to succeed in this world, so that when the time comes he will move to a better world, he must be "posel es ha'rishonim," reject his previous actions. Regardless of yesterday's mitzvah performance, the previous day's Torah study notwithstanding, he should reject it and act as if that it was not good enough. One should strive to perform mitzvos and study Torah with a new vigor, with a fresh enthusiasm every day as if the previous day's activity was not sufficient. There is no parameter to *avodas Hashem*, serving the Almighty. As good as one has acted, he should realize that he could have done better. Resting on one's past laurels is a dangerous habit, one that has caused the downfall of many an individual and organization.

David Ha'Melech asks in Sefer Tehillim (107:43), "Mi chacham v'yishmar "eilah?", "Who is the wise man who observes eilah, these?" He who takes care to observe the "eilah," to reject his successes of the past, demanding renewed effort in the future, is truly a wise man. One should never be complacent in his service of Hashem saying, "I have served Hashem properly." To make demands on oneself in spiritual matters is the first step towards success.

We may suggest another reason for rejecting the observances of the past: One might feel he had not done well and become obsessed by it. He becomes bogged down in guilt and depression refusing to go further to continue in his spiritual ascension as a result of "yesterday's" deficient service. He is instructed to observe "eilah" - reject the past - go on to improve the future. Repent, do teshuvah, but do not become obsessed with the teshuvah. One whose mind is constantly focused on correcting his sin has a difficult time moving forward and performing a mitzvah. Even repentance has its limit.

*And the assembly shall return him to his city of refuge,,he shall dwell in it until the death of the Kohen Gadol whom he had anointed with the sacred oil. (35:25)*

Upon reading the text, we are confronted with a glaring question, which is indeed asked by Chazal in the Talmud Makos 11b: "Regarding the words, 'whom he had anointed', they ask, was it he (the murderer) that anointed the Kohen Gadol?" They respond that the implication is, that it is about that particular Kohen Gadol who was a contemporary of the murderer, who was the one anointed during the murderer's days. While this may provide an interpretation of the text, the question regarding the specific vernacular still remains.

The Meshech Chochmah opines that the Torah employs this text by design. Indeed, the Torah is teaching a profound lesson with regard to hashgochah pratit, Divine Providence. It is quite possible that the lot of this murderer is to remain in the city of refuge until the Kohen Gadol's death. The Heavenly Tribunal has determined the length of the murderer's stay in the city of refuge. This number must correspond with the Kohen Gadol's pre-determined life-span. Consequently, it was necessary to "select" a Kohen Gadol whose designated life-span coincided with the murderer's stay in the city of refuge. In other words, the murderer is truly the "indirect" cause of the Kohen Gadol's appointment. This is alluded by the pasuk: Everything is in Hashem's hands. Every incident in life which might seem to be an isolated occurrence is not. It is purposeful and designated by Divine Providence. We have to open up our eyes in order to see how all the pieces of the great puzzle we call life fit into a perfect equation.

I recently read a story concerning my Rosh HaYeshivah, Horav Mordechai Gifter, Shlita, which illustrates this idea. He once went by plane, together with a number of students, to a wedding in Baltimore. Due to weather conditions in one of the connecting cities, their flight was subject to a number of delays. After awhile, the Rosh HaYeshivah realized that regardless of the connection, they would not make it to the wedding on time. They decided that before they "return" to Cleveland, they should daven Minchah, as it was getting late. Praying in a private room was preferable to praying in the middle of the concourse. Thus, they sought out a maintenance man to provide a room for them. They "luckily" located one who immediately proceeded to open a room for them. The "airport" minyan davened Minchah, and the men were about to leave when the maintenance man came to the door and asked one of the bachurim, young men, if he would help him recite Kaddish!

The Rosh Yeshivah, hearing this, approached the man and questioned him regarding his background. The man related the following story, "My father was an assimilated Jew and I, as you can see, am totally estranged from Judaism. My father passed away just a week ago. Last night he appeared to me in a dream and said, 'Say Kaddish for me!' I 'looked' up at my father and asked, 'How would I say Kaddish? I never went to Hebrew school. You never taught me to read. Moreover, I have no idea where to go for a minyan!' My father stared at me and said, 'Don't worry; I will provide you with a minyan.' You are the minyan that my father sent for me!"

After they said their good-byes to the man, with the promise to follow up on their newly developing relationship, the Rosh HaYeshivah turned to his students and remarked, "We thought we were traveling to Baltimore for a wedding. Actually we were travelling to this airport to provide a distinguished minyan for this man, so that he could fulfill his father's wish."

Just as the Kohen Gadol's appointment coincided with the unintentional murderer's act, so, too, is life filled with coincidences orchestrated by the Almighty as part of His Divine plan.

*And you shall prepare for yourselves cities of refuge. (35:11)*

The Torah instructs us to designate Cities of Refuge to protect the inadvertent killer from the relatives of the deceased. Horav Mordechai Gifter, Shlita, notes that the Torah does not use the term "zimun," to prepare, but rather uses "hikrisem," a word related to "mikreh," which alludes to an event occurring by chance, without forethought or preparation. Horav Gifter feels that the Torah is conveying a profound message to us. Violence is foreign to the Jew. If we hear that a Jew has committed a violent act, we must realize that this act represents the antithesis of the Torah's perspective of society. We are not permitted for one moment to think that violence is a part of society. If it occurs, it is a "mikreh," an unprepared, unplanned incident which is totally foreign to our Torah-dictated culture. Violence is not a Jewish theme.

Indeed, the culture that surrounds us, the secular society in which we live, has spewed forth such violence that it is difficult to record in a Torah-oriented paper. We must, however, realize that what goes on around us is not necessarily representative of us. Our Torah should shape our personality, governing our perspective on life.

Eisav is the archetype of violence. He was a warrior who preyed upon everything that was weaker than he. He venerated violence - he embodied it. The sons of Yaakov were foreign to Eisav's lifestyle. When Yaakov reproved Shimon and Levi, prior to his death, for their part in destroying the city of Shechem, he said, "Shimon and Levi are a pair, "klei chamas mecheiroseihem," the instruments of violence are their habitation." (Bereishis 49:5). This means that they are defined by their violent deed. Chazal offer another interpretation of "mecheiroseihem," based upon the root word "machor," to sell. Yaakov told his sons that they had stolen their weapons of violence, because - by right and by nature - these tools of violence had belonged to Eisav, the one who sold his bechorah, birthright. Klei chamas, tools of violence, instruments for committing destruction, belong to Eisav, the son who sold eternity for a bowl of materialism. When a Jew acts in a manner appropriate to Eisav, it should be viewed as "v'hikrisem," an isolated, foreign incident which is not typical of his character and culture.

*But if with suddenness, without enmity, did he push him... and the assembly shall return him to his city of refuge where he had fled... he shall dwell in it until the death of the Kohen Gadol. (35:22,25)*

In the Talmud Makos 11b, Chazal tell us that the unintentional murderer is not permitted to leave the City of Refuge. Indeed, he is confined there until the death of the Kohen Gadol. Nothing - regardless of its critical need - can change this. Even if he is a great general who is needed by Klal Yisrael, he may not leave. There he lives; there he will die; there he will be buried. This halachah is perplexing. We are taught that pikuach nefesh, issues concerning life or death, are of overriding

concern. Thus, they have the power to push aside every negative commandment- except for the cardinal sins of adultery, idolworship and murder. If Klal Yisrael is at war and the general's expertise is of crucial necessity, is that not pikuach nefesh? How many soldiers must perish in order to allow the general to leave the City of Refuge?

The Ohr Sameach on the Rambam, Hilchos Rotzeach, 7:8, explains that in reality it is not forbidden for the unintentional murderer to leave the City of Refuge. It is just that, if he leaves momentarily, the relative of his victim may kill him. It is not incumbent upon the unintentional murderer to put his life in danger for any reason, even for the benefit of others.

We still must endeavor to understand what transpires at the time of the Kohen Gadol's death that creates a situation in which the unintentional murderer may feel free to leave. In his Moreh Nevuchim, the Rambam explains that when the Kohen Gadol dies, everyone is so overwrought with grief -- they are so overwhelmed with pain and sorrow -- that it overrides their personal pain concerning their relative who had been killed.

This is a remarkable statement. On the one hand, we have just indicated that there exists a real threat to the life of the unintentional murderer, even many years after the tragic accident occurred. On the other hand, we see that if the Kohen Gadol dies, even if it is immediately following the tragic accident, the murderer is free to leave the City of Refuge, because the relative who seeks vengeance is too preoccupied with grief. This is incredible. This applies to all men, even the simplest Jew will be overwhelmed with grief, a grief that transcends even his own personal mourning for a close relative! How are we to understand this?

Horav Shmuel Truvitz, Shlita, posits that this halachah applies only to the Kohen Gadol, not the Navi, the melech, or the head of the Sanhedrin. The esteem in which the Kohen Gadol was held was unparalleled. Indeed, when he sat shiva, the people would console him by saying, "Anu kaporascha," "we are your atonement," we are willed to accept whatever fate has destined for you. This is attributed to the Kohen Gadol's function as the mechaper, "atoner" for Klal Yisrael. The Kohen Gadol serves as the one who goes before the Almighty into Kodshei Kodoshim, Holy of Holies, carrying the sins of Klal Yisrael, imploring Hashem's forgiveness. He prays for kaparah, atonement, for Klal Yisrael. This makes him special. Only after one realizes the gravity of sin and the awesome breach that it creates, can he can begin to grasp the function of the one who serves as an intermediary to invoke atonement for these sins. The Kohen Gadol had an awesome responsibility. This is why his passing was noted with an outpouring of such overwhelming grief.

*These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael, who went forth from the land of Egypt according to their legions. (33:1)*

The Torah makes a synopsis of Bnei Yisrael's forty-year journey through the desert. The forty-two encampments from Egypt to Eretz Yisrael are enumerated. Obviously, some places left stronger impressions than others. The summary alludes to the forty year history with its ups and downs. Is it really necessary to detail all forty-two places? Is it important to open up old wounds, to recall moments in our history that we would most seek to forget? Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, claims that one can and should make every effort to learn from his mistakes. Thus, he will be able to perceive his shortcomings, what provokes him to sin, what intimidates him and what inspires him. People are regrettably inclined to white wash their past faults. They seek to forget the moments in their lives when they "slipped" and

erred. They choose to remember only the positive moments, the times when they demonstrated courage and resolve, when their conviction held the central role in their lives.

This may represent human nature. Nonetheless, by relegating our negative experiences and actions to the side, we are tossing away the opportunity for self-improvement. This is one time that emphasizing the positive is not constructive. Thus, Hashem commanded Moshe to detail every one of their encampments. The names of the places allude to the experiences and occurrences associated with each place. They were admonished not to forget what had happened. Learn from the experiences of the past in order to enhance your present and future.

Horav Alpert adds that the lessons learned in the wilderness comprise an exceptional educational experience since they occurred in a place devoid of anything that might detract from the students' "concentration." There were no alien cultures with which to contend and no strange philosophies to turn their minds away from their spiritual experience. They were alone with Hashem. The Torah emphasizes the wilderness "classroom" that Klal Yisrael was privileged to attend. This type of Torah chinuch molded the perspective of our ancestors.

Finally, it is important to note that our sojourn in the wilderness is to be viewed as a portent for our present exile. We are also on a journey. We sojourn among the nations of the world - literally traveling through a spiritual exile. We must realize that as our ancestors journeyed through the desert as travelers on the way to their ultimate destination, their home in Eretz Yisrael, so, too, should we remember that we are also on the way to our journey's end, Eretz Yisrael. Our problem is that many of us have settled in the exile - physically and spiritually. We must keep the concept alive in our hearts and minds that we are in galus until the advent of Moshiach.

*They journeyed from the wilderness of Sinai and they camped in Kivroth HaTaavah. (33:16)*

Kivros HaTaavah, "the graves of craving," alludes to a place where many Jews died as a result of their craving for meat. Horav Tzvi Pesach Frank, zl, suggests that this pasuk relates more than Klal Yisrael's geographical journey. The pasuk implies that one who distances himself from Torah will ultimately end up in the clutches of taavah, lust. The only safeguard to keep an individual from being swallowed up by his physical desires is his immersion in the sea of Torah. Without Torah, one is subject to the whims and fancies of his yetzer hora.

Horav Frank bases his thesis upon the Talmud in Bava Metzia 85b where Chazal question, "Why was the land destroyed?" This is a reference to the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash and Klal Yisrael's ensuing exile. The response comes from Hashem, Who replies, "Because they abandoned My Torah." Why does the Talmud seek a reason for the churban? Do not Chazal in the Talmud Yoma clearly state that it was the three sins of robbery, murder and adultery that catalyzed the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash? Why seek additional reasons? This question leads us to believe that Chazal mean something else when they ask this question. They wonder what it was that caused Klal Yisrael to fall to such a nadir of sin. What instigated their moral and spiritual breakdown to the point that they resorted to robbery, murder, and adultery? The answer, says Hashem, is their abandonment of the Torah. This is the primary source of sin. Once the protective shield of Torah is removed, one is exposed to the harsh elements. Torah is much more than a source of knowledge; it is our lifeblood through which lives are sustained.