

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Shoftim

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
 Mesodah *bas Shmuel a''h*
 a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

A Tale of Two Travelers

It happened once that two individuals hailing from Eretz Yisrael appeared in the Lithuanian town of Radin at the same time. And while both had come for fundraising purposes, they were operating independently of each other, and their makeup and missions couldn't have been more different. One was collecting on behalf of some of Yerushalayim's most premier institutions, those dedicated to Torah study and performing acts of *chesed* (kindness). The other was an agent who had come to solicit donations for a wholly secular-minded organization.

Their independent efforts did not meet with the same level of success. One of the fundraisers made out quite well and left town — after a relatively brief stay — with pockets laden with donations. The other fundraiser, however, did not fare very well at all. He was forced to tough it out for a much longer period in order to come up with even a modest sum. And somewhat surprisingly, the individual who came out way behind was the one collecting on behalf of the Torah institutions.

And so the crestfallen *meshulach* (solicitor), much baffled by the outcome of his fundraising efforts (in comparison to his “colleague”), availed himself of the obvious opportunity that existed in this town. He poured out his heart to the resident sage — the Chofetz Chaim. The Chofetz Chaim addressed his frustrations and shed some light on the situation based on a section of this week's *parshah*.

The Chofetz Chaim pointed to two different “travelling” *mitzvos* contained in the Torah and the contrast between them.

Bon Voyage

This week's *parshah* discusses the case of the *rotzei'ach b'shogeig* (accidental murderer) (*Devarim 19:1-10*). The Torah instructs that the murderer must flee and exile himself to one of the *arei miklat* (designated cities of refuge), where he will be safe from the reach of the victim's avenger. One of the pertinent details associated with the establishment of the *ihr miklat* is the notion of convenience, as outlined in the Mishnah in Makkos (2:5):

וּמְכַנְנֹת לְהֵן דְּרָכִים מְזִוּ לְזוֹ, שְׁנֵאמַר תְּכִין לָךְ הַדֶּרֶךְ.

“The route (to the *ihr miklat*) must be straightforward, as it states (*Devarim 19:3*): “You shall prepare the way...”

The Mishnah conveys the idea that concrete steps must be taken to facilitate the *rotzei'ach's* journey to the *ihr miklat*, necessitating the provision of such amenities as a direct route and smooth, wide roads. The Rambam (*Hilchos Rotzei'ach U'shemiras Hanefesh*, 8:5) adds more particulars. All obstacles were removed from the path; bridges were erected to enable passage over rivers; and signposts directing the fleeing *rotzei'ach* to the *ihr miklat* were posted along the forks in the road.

Interestingly enough, while the Torah was quite insistent on easing the *rotzei'ach's* journey to the *ihr miklat*, we

find no such requirement regarding a related commandment. There exists a travel obligation corresponding to the Three Festivals, wherein Jewish males are enjoined to make an *aliyah l'regel* (pilgrimage to the Temple). Yet in this instance, there is no injunction to post directional signs pointing toward the Beis Hamikdash.

Why was the Torah seemingly more concerned with ensuring an easy and speedy journey for someone who committed manslaughter, while the same treatment is not accorded to those engaged in the virtuous and sacred task of pilgrimage to the Holy Temple?

“Excuse Me, but Do You Know the Way to...”

In truth, it is for this very reason that the Torah accommodated the journey of one and not the other. Who travels to a city of refuge? Someone who has accidentally killed another person. And while the act was unintentional, the perpetrator — in the eyes of the Torah — is not exactly “lily-white.” In fact, due in no small part to his negligence regarding human life, he is referred to as a *rasha* (wicked man) (cf. Makkos 10b, with Rashi s.v. *Veha'elokim*). Contact and association with such a person is highly undesirable. As such, the Torah desired that he be “whisked away” as soon as possible — “You shall prepare the way...” — before there would be a chance for his negative influence to affect others.

But the opposite is true for someone engaged in the performance of a mitzvah, on his way to the Holy Temple; his presence is an asset. Had the way been paved for a speedy *aliyah l'regel*, exposure to the pilgrims would have been severely limited. Since it was necessary for them to stop to ask directions, more and more people would come in contact with these virtuous individuals. In other words, the lack of posted signs was a purposeful orchestration, intended for the worthy cause of publicizing the mitzvah of *aliyah l'regel* and even attracting others to its fulfillment.

Thus the Chofetz Chaim assuaged the frustrations of the *meshulach* from Yerushalayim. “You see,” he told the man, “the other solicitor came here on behalf of those devoid of or even opposed to Torah values. As such, Hakadosh Boruch Hu was concerned over the potential harmful effects of his presence. He did not want this man spending too much time with others and possibly spewing and spreading a gospel that is antithetical to the Torah. So He “blessed” his fundraising efforts with quick success, “showed him the door,” and sent him straight on his way.

“But with you, it was another story altogether. Those associating with you stand only to accrue much spiritual benefit. And so, in a sense, Hashem purposefully forestalled your mission. Not, *chas v'shalom*, because you were found unworthy; on the contrary, it was on account of your virtue that he had you “detained.” Look what happened as a result. Now that you had to spend much time and effort visiting potential donors and speaking of your cause, you ended up spreading the message of the primacy of Torah study and acts of *chesed*. Hakadosh Boruch Hu is interested that people like you should stick around (*Peninim Mishulchan Gavohah*, quoting a disciple of the Chofetz Chaim).

In truth, this phenomenon — the perceived financial success of Torah’s detractors, in stark contradistinction to the dire straits in which Torah institutions often find themselves — is worthy of further study. It is a theme we will return to, *im yirtzeh Hashem*, in the coming weeks.