

# ROADSIGNS TO ETERNITY

*by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky*

The Torah not only tells us how to live our lives and where to go, this week it tells us how to get there as well! First the Torah tells us about a man who was negligent and accidentally killed someone. We are to establish cities of refuge where he can flee and live until he can return home. "You shall separate three cities for yourselves in the midst of your Land, which Hashem, your G-d, gives you to possess it" (Deuteronomy 19:2). But the Torah does more than tell us to build cities of refuge. In an unprecedented command, it establishes a highway commission, telling us, "Prepare the way for yourself, ... and it shall be for any murderer to flee there (ibid v.3)

Rashi quotes the Talmud in Makos that there were signs posted at each crossroad pointing and declaring, "Refuge! Refuge!" each pointing the way to the nearest refuge city.

But, why? If road signs should be erected, shouldn't they be for Jerusalem, guiding the thousands of tri-annual travelers from the north and south who journeyed there for the shalosh regalim? Why should cities that house manslaughter offenders, get guideposts while the holiest city of Israel doesn't?

Rav Meir Shapiro, established one of Europe's most prestigious Yeshivos of its era. The Yeshiva Chachmei Lublin, not only housed a magnificent Bais Medrash, it had a spacious dormitory and dining hall. Its fine accommodations would spare Yeshiva boys the embarrassment of having to eat teg, virtually begging for meals in the homes of wealthier business people.

But in order for the students not to plead, Rabbi Shapiro did. And so he traveled around the globe, crossing the ocean to the US and Canada, to raise funds for the beautiful Yeshiva. In fact, he even served as a cantor in a prestigious North American congregation in lieu of a one thousand dollar gift to the Yeshiva.

On a visit to the office of a prominent businessman, one who had strayed from the path paved in Europe by his parents and grandparents, Rabbi Shapiro was asked an unusual question.

"Rabbi," the industrialist proposed, "why is it that you have to see so many Jews to accomplish your goal? If Hashem wanted your Yeshiva to flourish, why didn't He arrange that you meet just one philanthropist who will undertake the entire project, by adding a few zeros to the amount of his check? After all," continued the magnate. There are plenty of modern institutions in the US that have been established by one benefactor!"

Rabbi Shapiro smiled. "Let me explain: Hashem not only wants that the Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin should thrive, he wants as many people in America as possible to know what is happening there as well! Had one man given me a check, and I would have taken the next boat back, I never would be talking to you about Yiddishkeit, about your heritage, your past, and your future! Now however, I meet hundreds of Jews who have heard about the tremendous love for Torah that our students have. They have heard the beauty of their mission and their devotion to the cause of learning Torah. They know what Tractate we are studying and how we apply Torah to everyday life.

Some ask about the size of the building and all about the Sifrei Torah that will be placed in the Aron Kodesh.

When someone with a single check endows a music hall, nobody else gets involved in its development and its intricate details become the obsession of individuals, not the shared responsibility of a community! So there is no excitement, no involvement, no buzz! You can't build enthusiasm in that manner.

Imagine the scene: A man kills accidentally; he has to flee to the city of refuge. He does not know where the city is. He knocks on a door. "Hello," he exclaims to the startled homeowner, "I just killed someone, um... accidentally. Do you know where the Ir Miklat (city of refuge) is?"

Anxiety, depression and even despair is fostered. The buzz is bad. There are murderers loose. And when they inform the public, often enough of their misdeeds, it sets an apathetic tone, where reckless manslaughter becomes the norm. The shock of death is dulled, and it becomes part of the repertoire of the urban experience. And wanton disregard becomes contagious. And the virus of sin spreads rapidly. And so the signs are set and the directions are clear and the murderers flee taking refuge in clearly marked cities, no questions asked, at least until the situation is adjudicated.

On the other hand, take the trip to Jerusalem: The city with no directional advisories. Imagine: There is a crossroad. There is no sign. One must knock on a door. "Excuse me, do you know how to get to Jerusalem?"

"Oh! You are going to Yerushalayim?" the person declares and asks in unison. "Maybe you can wait, I'll come along!" "Perhaps you can shlep this small package for my son in Yeshiva there!" (Some things never change!) Oh! You are going to Jerusalem! When is Yom Tov? It is time for me to make my preparations as well! When people have to share the good queries there is excitement, tumult, even spirituality in the air! And it becomes contagious for the good!

*Dedicated by the Martz Family in memory of Nettie Martz & Florence Martz*

*Best Wishes to Congregation Ohav Zedek and Rabbi Meir Rosenberg of Wilkes Barre, PA*

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