

SETBACKS AND COMEBACKS

by Shlomo Katz

Parshios Matos & Masei

Matot-Masei
Volume XVIII, No. 38
28 Tamuz 5764
July 17, 2004

Sponsored by
Mr. and Mrs. David Marwick
in memory of Reba Sklaroff a"h
and Morris Bervin a"h

Today's Learning:
Niddah 10:7-8
O.C. 247:1-3
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bechorot 35
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Nazir 4

One of the laws in this week's parashah is that an accidental murderer must flee to a City of Refuge and remain there until the incumbent Kohen Gadol passes away. Why is the fate of a manslaughterer bound up with that of the Kohen Gadol? R' Elya Meir Bloch z"l (1894-1955; founder and rosh yeshiva of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland) explains:

The Kohen Gadol's job is to bring the Shechinah to rest among the Jewish People. On the other hand, murder drives the Shechinah away. [Our Sages teach that even one who kills accidentally is considered a murderer in some sense because G-d protects blameless people from committing offenses even unintentionally.] One who has committed such an act cannot be part of the same society as the Kohen Gadol. Moreover, such a person must realize that he cannot continue life as usual. Instead, he must uproot himself and go to a City of Refuge and begin a new life. Only when the Kohen Gadol dies can the accidental murderer feel that the chapter of his life that was so inimical to the Kohen Gadol's mission is over, and then he can return to his former home.

This understanding has broader applications, R' Bloch observes. Any time a person has experienced a spiritual setback, even inadvertently and unintentionally, he must realize that he cannot go on with life as usual. Rather, some change is required to address the situation in which he finds himself.

(In addition, R' Bloch teaches, we learn from here that a person must act in a way that furthers the mission of the Kohen Gadol and other spiritual leaders.) (Peninei Da'at)

"The commanders of the thousands in the legions, the officers of the thousands and the officers of the hundreds, approached Moshe. They said to Moshe, 'Your servants took a census of the men of war under our command, and not a man of us is missing'." (31:48-49)

In his classic work on ethics and philosophy, Chovot Ha'levavot / Duties of the Hearts, Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pakudah z"l (Saragossa, Spain; early 11th century) relates the story of a tzaddik who met victorious warriors returning from battle. He said to them, "It is premature to rejoice, for you have won the battle and collected booty only in the small war. The greatest battle, though, still lies ahead."

The soldiers asked him, "What battle is that?"

He answered, "The fight against the yetzer hara and its agents." [Until here from Chovot Ha'levavot, Sha'ar Yichud Ha'maaseh Ch.5]

R' Moshe Gruenwald z"l (rabbi and rosh yeshiva in Khust, Hungary; died 1911) explains the above teaching of the Chovot Ha'levavot in light of another story in that work. There it is recorded that a pious man said to his disciples, "If I believed that you were free of all sin, I would fear for your sake from something that is worse than sin, namely, that you might believe yourselves to be tzaddikim." Similarly, why must a victorious warrior prepare for battle against the yetzer hara? Because the haughtiness he feels makes him particularly susceptible.

R' Gruenwald continues: When the armies of Bnei Yisrael returned from the battle against Midian, as related in our verses, they knew that they had to prepare for the next battle, the one against the yetzer hara. And, they knew that this meant they had to subdue any feelings of haughtiness. But they did feel haughty. They "took a census" and felt as if "not a man was missing (i.e., lacking)." Therefore, the next verse (31:50) relates, "So we have brought an offering for Hashem - what any man found of gold vessels, anklet and bracelet, ring, earring, and clasp, to atone for our souls before Hashem."

(Arugat Ha'bosem)

R' Shlomo Halberstam z"l (1907-2000; the Bobover Rebbe) finds the above teaching of the Chovot Ha'levavot alluded to in another verse, i.e., in Moshe's words to the tribes Reuven and Gad later in our parashah (32:22), "And the Land shall be conquered before Hashem, and then you shall return -- then you shall be 'clean' before Hashem and Yisrael." After you successfully conquer the Land, then you also need to ensure that you are clean of any sin before Hashem and Yisrael.

(Kerem Shlomo, Vol. III)

"They journeyed from Charadah and encamped in Makhelot." (33:25)

Literally, this verse describes the travels of Bnei Yisrael from a place called "Charadah" to a place called "Makhelot" - two of the 42 stops that Bnei Yisrael made in the desert, as our parashah describes. Many commentaries, in particular those by chassidic authors, search for lessons in these place names, for why else would the Torah relate them to us?!

R' Mendel Hager z"l (rabbi of Oyber-Visheve, Romania; died 1941) observes that "Charadah" means "fear." Our verse teaches: How can a person overcome ("travel away from") the fear that his prayers will not be accepted? By journeying to "Makhelot," as we read in Tehilim (68:27), "In Makhelot / gatherings bless Hashem." This relates to our Sages' teaching that G-d does not reject prayers that are offered with a congregation.

(She'airit Menachem)

"An inheritance of Bnei Yisrael shall not make rounds from tribe to tribe; rather Bnei Yisrael shall cleave every man to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. Every daughter who inherits an inheritance of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael shall become the wife of someone from a family of her father's tribe, so that everyone of Bnei Yisrael will inherit the inheritance of his fathers." (36:7-8)

After Hashem informed Moshe of the law that a daughter could inherit her father's land if he had no sons, the male relatives of such women (Tzlofchad's daughters) complained that this might result in Tzlofchad's land leaving his tribe (the tribe of Menashe) forever. This would happen if Tzlofchad's daughters married out of the tribe of Menashe; then Tzlofchad's grandchildren/heirs would belong to their father's tribe.

Moshe responded that Hashem had commanded that Tzlofchad's daughters and any similarly-situated women marry only men from their own tribes. Tzlofchad's daughters complied. However,

the Gemara (Ta'anit 30b) derives from verses that this restriction applied only during the first generation after the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. After that time, the tribes could intermarry freely.

What was the purpose of this restriction and why was it in effect only temporarily? R' Samson Raphael Hirsch z"l (Frankfurt, Germany; died 1888) explains:

The law of Yovel - that land that was sold reverts to its hereditary owner at the Jubilee Year - demonstrates the importance that the Torah attaches to keeping the borders of the provinces of the tribes intact. This is in recognition of the unique role that each tribe has in the development of the Nation as a whole. We should not think, writes R' Hirsch, that a full Torah life is reserved for only one class of people. Rather, as Yaakov's blessings to his sons before his death (in Parashat Vayechi) indicate, the Nation needs soldiers, sailors, thinkers, tailors, rabbis, teachers, cattlemen, field-workers, merchants, etc., and all are full participants in the life of the Torah Nation.

It was essential to keep each tribe's unique role distinct at the beginning of the Nation's independent life in order to emphasize the importance and equal necessity of each. This required the tribes to live separately, as well, in order to develop their own particular identities. Once the land was settled, however, and the above message was clearly understood, such enforced separation was no longer required.

(Commentary on the Torah)

R' Shmuel Sperber z"l

R' Shmuel Sperber was born in 1905 in Brasov, Transylvania, where his father, R' David, was the rabbi. (The elder Rabbi Sperber was among the leading Hungarian rabbis of the period. After World War II, he settled in Eretz Yisrael and was among the spiritual leaders of the Agudath Israel movement.) Young Shmuel studied in the yeshivot of Oyber-Visheve, Hungary (and after World War I, Romania) under the tutelage of that town's rabbis, R' Eliezer Dovid Gruenwald and R' Mendel Hager. At age 15, and notwithstanding his chassidic education, young Shmuel established a youth organization in Brasov where he delivered Torah lectures in Modern Hebrew.

After receiving semichah and marrying, R' Sperber lived in Iasi, Romania where he delivered sophisticated derashot to the city's intelligentsia. In 1931, after being attacked by anti-Semites, he decided to leave Romania and settle in England. There, he enrolled in law school at the University of London and also founded a yeshiva, Ohr Torah. Unlike in most yeshivot of the time, classes in Ohr Torah were held in English. (However, the school closed after only one year.) While in London, R'

Sperber also became known for his deeply philosophical derashot, and he was offered the pulpit of one of London's shuls.

With the arrival in England of the large transports of German-Jewish children on the eve of the Holocaust, R' Sperber became actively involved in comforting and educating them. At this same time, R' Sperber became active in the Mizrachi movement, and he opened a camp in North Wales to prepare approximately 200 children for life on a kibbutz. Later he moved to Manchester, where he continued to work with youth, and then back to London to become an adjunct professor at the University of London.

In 1971, R' Sperber settled in Israel. He died on 29 Menachem Av 5745 (1985). One of his sons is the author of a multi-volume work on the history of minhagim / customs and of unusual ritual objects. (Source: Encyclopedia Shel Ha'Tzionut Ha'datit, Vol. 6)

Copyright © 2004 by [Shlomo Katz](#) and **Torah.org**.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>.

Hamaayan needs your support! Please consider sponsoring Hamaayan in honor of a happy occasion or in memory of a loved one. Did you know that the low cost of sponsorship - only \$18 - has not changed in seventeen years? Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.