

WISH YOU HAD MORE TIME AT THE OFFICE?

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"Build for yourselves cities for your small children, and enclosures for your flocks, and that which comes from your mouths, you shall do." [32:24]

The tribes of Reuven and Gad, because they had large flocks, asked Moshe for permission to settle on the east side of the Jordan River. Moshe questioned them, criticizing them if they intended to "avoid the draft" and leave the other tribes to worry about occupying the Land of Israel to the west of the river, as G-d commanded. They insist, however, that they will merely "build flock-enclosures for our possessions here, and cities for our small children," [32:16] and will then lead the way, not returning home until the other tribes have received their inheritance.

Moshe responds by saying essentially that they must do what they pledged. They must quickly build cities and grazing areas, and then lead the way. If they do so, then they will be "clean of sin before G-d and Israel, and will inherit that land as their inheritance before G-d." [32:22]

Given that this is so, that Moshe simply told them to do as they had promised, the response of the two tribes is surprising. "And the Children of Gad and the Children of Reuven spoke to Moshe, saying, 'your servants will do as our master commanded.'" [32:25] Are they doing what Moshe commanded, or as they themselves pledged?

The Ksav Sofer, quoting from the Medrash, finds a very important distinction. The two tribes said "we will build flock-enclosures for our possessions here, and cities for our small children." Moshe, however, reversed the order: "build for yourselves cities for your small children, and enclosures for your flocks." The tribes of Gad and Reuven worried first about their possessions, and then about their little children; Moshe said to them, "do not make the trivial central." Put first things first -- build cities for your children, and then and only then ensure that your flocks are properly protected.

When a person desires money, and is chasing after it, then you cannot rely upon him and his commitments. Says the Ksav Sofer, his desire for money will cause him to renege on those commitments if they stand in his way. Only if the children of Reuven and Gad can reverse the order, and worry about their families before their possessions, can they be trusted. This is why Moshe concludes, "and that which comes from your mouths, you shall do." If you take care of your families before your flocks, then you can be trusted to meet your commitment to the nation as well.

It is natural for a person to feel attached to his possessions, and to desire more. Only in the end are

we reminded that "few people died wishing they had spent more time at the office." We must remember that there are higher priorities, and be sure to address them -- if we know which commitments are most important, then people will know that they can rely upon our commitments to them, as well.

Good Shabbos,
Rabbi Yaakov Menken