



Kinder Torah

For parents to share with children at the Shabbos table
Parshas Mattos / Masei



Priorities

May we settle here on the eastern side of the Jordan River (outside of the Land of Israel)?" asked the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe (Bamidbar 32). Moshe Rabbeinu replied, "Have you not learned from the mistakes of your fathers? They were made to wander and die in the desert due to their unwillingness to enter the Land of Israel." "We have a different reason for wanting to settle outside of the Land," answered the tribes. "We need to build stables for our livestock here and cities for our children." "What? You are more concerned about your livestock than your children?" responded Moshe (see Rashi). "If that is the case, you will never succeed. First you must build cities for your children, and then take care of your livestock. Only then will you be allowed to settle in the Jordan Valley."

Rashi is telling us that the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe had their priorities reversed. They were more concerned about their livelihood (represented by their livestock) than the future generations of the Jewish people (represented by their families). In our lives, we must always keep the priorities in their proper order.

Torah learning receives top priority. The gemora in Yoma 35b tells us a story about three people who came to their final judgement, a poor man, a rich man and a wicked man. The heavenly angels asked them why they did not fulfill their potential in Torah learning. The poor man answered, "I was so poor, I was too busy making a living." They replied, "You were no poorer than Hillel. He could not afford the entrance fee to the Beis Hamedrash, so he went up to the skylight on a freezing snowy night to listen to the Rebbe speak. Being poor did not stop him from learning Torah." The rich man answered, "I was busy with my businesses." They replied, "You were no richer than Elazar Ben Horkinus. He inherited 1000 cities and 1000 cargo ships. Yet each day, he would take a satchel of flour on his shoulders and go from city to city and country to country to learn Torah."

The wicked man said, "I was too caught up in my desires." They replied, "You were no more handsome than Yosef Hatzaddik. He resisted the continual advances of the wife of Potiphar." Hillel obligated the poor people, Elazar Ben Horkinus obligated the rich, and Yosef Hatzaddik obligated the wicked to learn Torah. They all made learning their top priority.

Good Friends and Neighbors

You shall designate cities of refuge for those who kill unintentionally (Bamidbar 35:9). A fall from a roof or a ladder, a slip of a sharp tool, and a life is taken accidentally. The killer must be punished. "But it was only an accident," you may say. Hashem chose this particular person to be involved in this accident. He also decreed the punishment. The killer must leave his home and family and live in a refuge city. In the days before mass transportation, tele-phones, fax machines, and e-mail, this was an almost unbearable punishment. The killer was totally separated from his loved ones. What was the purpose of this punishment? The killer was placed into an environment that would have a positive influence upon him. Leviim lived in these refuge cities. They were totally involved in learning Torah and serving Hashem. They would be good role models for him to emulate. They would inspire him to do *tshuva* (correct his mistakes).

Kinderlach . . .

"It is so important to have good friends. Play only with the children who are playing nicely. We are all working to acquire good middos (character traits). Our sages tell us to stay in the company of good people. We will learn good middos from them."

Ahavas Chinam

Take revenge for the Children of Israel against the Midianites." (Bamidbar 31:2) Why take revenge only against the Midianites and not the

Moabites? These two nations conspired together to hire Bilaam to curse the Jewish people. Rashi explains that the Moabites were afraid of being conquered by the Jews. Therefore, they tried to defeat the Jews with Bilaam's curses. The Midianites, however, had no reason to be involved. They entered a fight that was not theirs, consequently, we were commanded to wage war against them. One possible motivation for Midian's action against the Jews was *sinas chinam* (senseless hatred). That is one of the worst sins between man and his fellow man. *Sinas Chinam* is what sent the Jewish people into this 2000-year exile and is preventing the Moshiach from coming. One way to overcome *sinas chinam* is to practice *ahavas chinam* (loving a fellow Jew for no reason). Do something good for him and come to love him.

Kinderlach . . .

"Share you treats with the other kinderlach. Help them with their homework. Let them play with your toys. By giving to them, you will come to love them. That is ahavas chinam. This can help bring Moshiach, and rebuild the Beis HaMikdash. With Hashem's help Moshiach will come and we will not have to fast this Tisha B'Av."

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