

## The cities that you shall give to the Leviim: the six cities that you shall provide for a murderer to flee there. (35:6)

Forty-eight cities were set aside for the *Leviim*. Of these, six cities were specifically for the *rotzeach b'shogeg*, unintentional murderer. One wonders why men of such spiritual distinction were relegated to live with individuals who had blood on their hands. True, the murders that they committed were unintentional, but there are various levels of lack of intent, some of which border on carelessness. Only Hashem knows the truth. The *Leviim* led very spiritual lives. Obviously, their families had a different moral and spiritual compass than that which guided the rest of the nation. Is it fair that these fine, upstanding people should have to have “marked” men in their community?

The *Sefer HaChinuch* offers two reasons for the *Leviim* serving as “host” to the unintentional murderer – both focusing on their unique spirituality. In order to inspire the unintentional murderer, to teach him the value of human life, it is necessary that he be exposed to holy and devout people. In his second explanation, he offers a powerful reason which goes to the very core of *bein adam lachaveiro*, relationships between man and his fellow man. The *Leviim* are sensitive and caring people to whom character refinement is essential and *middos tovos*, positive character traits, are the measure of man. Such people will bear no animus, harbor no grudge against the unintentional murderer, even if his victim were one of his own – a friend, a relative! This is the type of people they were and the upbringing they had and imparted to their children. It was into such a lofty environment that the *rotzeach b'shogeg* was thrust. It is in such a community, surrounded by such caring individuals, that he has a chance.

A powerful statement. The Torah is concerned for the emotions of the unintentional murderer. Obviously, we are not dealing here with an act of violence that was purely accidental, because then the perpetrator is as much a victim as the deceased. There is no requirement of *ir miklat*, city of refuge, in such a case. It is when the “accident” is ambiguous, when the lack of intention is a cross between accident and carelessness, that the individual must seek refuge. It is also a form of penance for his actions. Clearly, he did not expect to spend years away from everyone, without his family and friends, quite possibly not the most popular man in the community. He feels bad; he is depressed, dejected; his life is a shambles. It is in such a community of unique individuals that he has a chance. The Torah cares about everyone's feelings – even those of one whose actions, albeit unintentional, placed himself into this predicament.

A human being's emotions should weigh heavy on the hearts and minds of every Jew. Noticeably, I did not use the word Jew, but rather, human being. Hashem created people with emotions. It is wrong to hurt anyone. Once we lose our sensitivity it taints us, and eventually we will become insensitive to the plight of our brethren. In an inspirational address, **Horav Shabsai Yudelevitz, zl**, poignantly describes for us the cries of the mother of Sisra, the Canaanite king, who the Jews, under the leadership of Barak ben Avinoam and Devorah *HaNeviyah* defeated. First, some background on the story.

The Jewish army was up against a powerful general – one who had heretofore been undefeated in battle. *Chazal* teach us that Sisra was an individual of extraordinary physical strength. At the age of thirty, he had already succeeded in conquering the entire civilized world. When he came upon a city fortified by walls, Sisra would just stand opposite the wall and scream. The walls came tumbling down. It mattered not if the wall was thick or supported. It came tumbling down. When Sisra would bathe in the Kishon River, he would trap fish in his beard – enough to feed many people. Animals and wild beasts trembled from the sound of his voice.

Sisra was supported by an army of millions of the most powerful warriors and nine hundred armed chariots. He was a formidable leader with an equally formidable army. His battles would last about three to four hours before the enemy either surrendered or was destroyed. Thus, when six hours had passed and Sisra's mother had not yet heard from her "dear" son, she became concerned. At first, she conjectured that he must have stumbled on an incredible amount of booty. "Certainly in his victory he is gathering silks, gold and silver," his mother fantasized. She could only think of him as a successful warrior who was delayed due to an overwhelming amount of spoils. She could never imagine that her son had fallen prey to the weak Jews.

When she received the news of his death (at the hands of a woman, Yael), her distress was not limited to that of a mother losing a son; her weeping reflected the shocking inversion of her entire view of the world. Everything that she had expected had shockingly been destroyed, and the weak, hapless enemy, about whom she had never even given a second thought, had now become the victor. She wept because now she realized that all that she had accepted as true and real had been shattered.

Sisra's mother wailed one hundred times. She wailed because her son was late in returning from battle where she was certain he had destroyed the Jewish army. This was no simple weeping of a sweet mother for her loving child. It was defiled wailing emanating from a horrible woman who was concerned that her son was late in returning from killing Jews.

*Tosfos* (*Talmud Rosh Hashanah* 33) state that the reason we blow the *shofar* one hundred blasts (*Yevamos*) is that Sisra's mother wailed one hundred times. His mother was certain that Sisra would emerge victorious from this battle, as he had from earlier, more difficult battles. War is war, however, and there is always that one obscure --almost irrational -- doubt that something might occur which would change the course of the war, turning it against her son. This one doubt initiated her worry, which intensified after the usual four hours had elapsed.

This idea is represented by the *shofar's teruah*, wailing sound. During the course of the year, indeed, during the course of life, we lull ourselves into believing that *olamo k'minhago, noheig*, the world is as it is, goes on the way it was; life is life, and we will continue living. We have become so entrenched in our complacent view that we have come to accept life as we live it – disregarding the truth as Hashem would like us to see. The *shofar's* sound awakens our inner senses, forcing us to realize that a change in perspective is necessary. It is time to remove our blinders and see the

truth. Man must awaken to the realization that he is not in charge; he is not in control. Just as the world of Sisra's mother, who had it all -- fame, fortune, *goyishe nachas*, a life of privilege-- was rudely shattered, so, too, are we made conscious that Hashem runs the world, and we must be participants according to His will – not ours.

An inspirational homily, but what does it have to do with the unintentional murderer living in the Levi city? It is all about empathy, concern for another person's feelings. The *rotzeiach b'shogeg* committed an unintentional act of murder. A Jewish life was snuffed out as a result of his error. He is miserable, alone and in need of a friend. The *Levi* is that individual, who, because of his spiritual upbringing and affinity, is able to overlook what most others will view as a fault. He will be sensitive to the *rotzeiach's* tears; he will understand his emotions and support him in his time of need.