

## Then Moshe set aside three cities on the bank of the Jordan. (4:41)

The *parshah* of the *arei miklat*, cities of refuge, which Moshe *Rabbeinu* designated, seems to be misplaced. Up until now, Moshe has been rebuking *Klal Yisrael*, reminding them of their special relationship with Hashem, and informing them of the consequences of straying from this relationship. Later, in *Perek 5*, he exhorts them to listen to the Torah and to observe its precepts. He then underscores this admonition with a presentation of the Revelation at *Har Sinai* and repeating the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments. Nestled in between the earlier rebuke, and later presentation and encouragement to follow the *mitzvos*, is the designation of the cities of refuge. Is this really the appropriate place for this *parshah*?

The **Shem MiShmuel** explains that this is certainly a fitting place for the *parshah* detailing the *arei miklat*. Moshe felt it necessary to rebuke the nation and to exhort

them concerning the many *mitzvos* they must perform as members of *Klal Yisrael*. He was also aware that all of this can be quite compelling and even disheartening. While rebuke is an indication that one cares about -- and is concerned for -- the welfare of the subject of his rebuke, it can also create feelings of despair and hopelessness, "How can I succeed when so many before me have failed?" This depressive feeling could very well have coursed through the minds of those standing there that day.

Moshe attempted to assuage their feelings when he talked about Hashem's love for them. Nonetheless, they were acutely aware that, in the past, these feelings of Divine love did not prevent them from sinning with the Golden Calf and /or to prevent their forefathers from committing a number of other transgressions during their forty year sojourn in the wilderness. Indeed, they had every reason to be concerned. If

their predecessors, who had lived in an environment replete with miracles had sinned, what should they say? They were going to enter a land in which they would have to lead normal lives. How could they possibly manage to maintain a compatible relationship with Hashem amid all of this pressure? They were overwhelmed with despair.

This is why Moshe recorded the *parshah* of *arei miklat* right in between the rebuke and the presentation of *mitzvos*. The city of refuge is a place where the unintentional murderer flees to protect himself from family members of his victim who are out for vengeance. Although the death which he caused was accidental, he, nonetheless, had terminated a human being's life. As such, he has lost his connection to his life force, his right to continued spiritual existence.

The *arei miklat* are administered by the *Leviim*, whose primary task (other than living in the six *arei miklat* and forty-two cities designated for the *Leviim*) was to sing hymns of praise to Hashem in the

*Bais Hamikdash*. They served as the medium for elevating the spiritual inspiration with which the people were imbued when they visited the sanctuary. As such, the *Levi* is the vehicle through which the Jew comes closer to Hashem and feels more connected with the Almighty. The *Levi* will help the unintentional murderer renew his bond with Hashem, reestablish his life force, and thus rehabilitate himself from his error. The cities of refuge are the environment which engender hope for the murderer. They are the medium for returning him to normal life.

The very existence of the *arei miklat* imparts a basic truth: you can always return; there is hope for the future. One does not give up. Even one whose life force has been severed as a result of his committing an act of violence, albeit accidentally, can return. He, too, has hope. Just as the murderer draws spiritual sustenance and renewed life force by way of the *Levi*, so, too, may any Jew, under any circumstance, draw renewed enthusiasm and hope from another.

This is what Moshe taught the people when he injected the *parshah* of *arei miklat* in between the rebuke of the past exhortation concerning the future: one never despairs; one never gives up hope. One always has the opportunity for rehabilitation and renewal.