

Pens for the flocks shall we build here for our livestock and cities for our small children. (32:16)

The response tendered by *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven*, “we will build pens for our flock and (then) cities for our small children,” did not sit well with Moshe *Rabbeinu*. By prioritizing the needs of the flock before those of the children, they were implying that the sheep had greater significance in their eyes than the children. Moshe immediately corrected their attitude. It is difficult to believe that such holy individuals as *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* would have misplaced priorities. To prioritize sheep over children is to confuse one’s priorities in life. It is not imaginable that members of the *Dor Deah*, Generation of Knowledge, would be guilty of such an error.

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, explains that addressing the needs of the flocks was indeed all for their children (is it not always?), but they got carried away. Concerned with their livelihood so they could better support their families, they became involved in raising animals. They became so involved that they lost sight of their goals, the children; and they turned their livelihood, the animals, into an end onto itself. As a result, they neglected to pay better (or at least equal) attention to their children.

A person’s sensitivities are most often influenced by his actions. Indeed, a person cares most about something for which he has expended energy, effort and time. Now, if *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven*, who were holy individuals, whose perception of Hashem and everything spiritual was light years above ours, were negatively influenced by their involvement in their mundane endeavors of earning a livelihood, what should we say? When a person spends the majority of his waking hours engrossed in commerce – it takes its toll. One forgets that his original goal was only to provide for his family – not to devote his lifetime to earning a nest egg that would provide for the next few generations of his family.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* adds that a similar idea applies to one who has chosen Torah as his lifetime endeavor. He must remember that he still has a family at home – children who need a father, a wife who needs a husband. The bottom line is that we all have our priorities, but we must neither misplace them, nor get carried away by them. Our families are all important and providing for them is essential, but at what expense? Torah study is paramount, but so are our wives and children. There must be a balance in life, which the Torah provides – if we are willing to listen.