

As to the cities that you shall designate, there shall be six cities of refuge for you. (35:13)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* designated three cities on *Eivar haYardein*, the eastern bank of the Jordan River, as *Arei Miklat*, Cities of Refuge. The other three cities in *Eretz Yisrael* proper were to be designated by Yehoshua once the nation had conquered and divided the land. Clearly, the numbers appear disproportionate, given the fact that only two and one-half tribes made their homes on the eastern bank, while the other nine and one-half tribes resided in *Eretz Yisrael*. *Rashi* explains that, sadly, murder was more prevalent on the eastern bank. While this applies to premeditated murder, *Ramban* explains that the preponderance of murders would possibly cause the murderers to cover up their insidious behavior by claiming that their acts had been inadvertent. This would allow them to make a mad rush for the nearest city of refuge. Additionally, we may suggest that, in a society in which human life has little value, it is not unusual for more “accidents” to occur. People are just not as careful, because they do not care as much.

Rashi teaches that, although Moshe designated the eastern bank cities while the nation was still in the wilderness, they did not become cities of refuge until Yehoshua had designated the other cities in *Eretz Yisrael*. The **Or Sameach** offers an inspirational reason for this. Imagine someone who inadvertently kills while *Klal Yisrael* was yet in the wilderness. He must immediately flee to the city of refuge where he becomes a pseudo-prisoner until the passing of the *Kohen Gadol*. The *Kohen Gadol* at that time was Elazar *ben* Aharon *HaKohen*. The Torah writes that Elazar was to partner with Yehoshua in conquering and dividing up *Eretz Yisrael* – a process which took fourteen years. Therefore, the unintentional murderer was acutely aware that a sentence to serve in the *Ir Miklat* was certain to last at least fourteen years.

To what does this man have to look forward? He has absolutely no hope of leaving the *Ir Miklat* for a minimum of fourteen years. While waiting – hoping – that the *Kohen Gadol* was going to die sounds gruesome, to the individual languishing in the city of refuge, away from his family and friends, it is his only source of hope. Now, he has none, because the present *Kohen Gadol*, Elazar, was going to be around for a while. A man who has no hope, has no life. Therefore, the *Arei Miklat* in *Eivar haYardein* did not go into effect until the Land had been conquered and divided. We all need hope.

A father and his young son were interred in Auschwitz. The two were all that remained of a once thriving family. *Chanukah* was fast approaching, and the father was concerned that he and his son light the *menorah*. It would probably be the last time. Out of some scrap metal which he was able to find, he fashioned a makeshift *menorah*. For candle wicks, he tore a few threads from his prison uniform. For oil, he used a pat of butter which, through great difficulty he was able to obtain from one of the guards.

The young boy was shocked by his father's behavior. After all, to get caught would mean certain

death for everyone on their block. How could his father endanger them all just to light a “candle”? Furthermore, by using the butter for oil instead of food, he was wasting precious calories. He challenged his father, “Surely, it is better to place the butter on a crust of bread than burn it for nothing.” The father looked at his son pensively and replied, “My child, both you and I know that a person can live a long time without food, but, I tell you, that a person cannot live a single day without hope. This flame is the fire of hope. Never allow it to be extinguished. Not here – not anywhere. Without hope there is no life.”