

"The children of Reuven and the children of Gad had abundant livestock... they approached him (Moshe) and they said, pens for the flock we shall build here for our livestock and cities for our children... and Moshe said to them... Build for yourselves cities for your small children and pens for your livestock." (37:1,16,24)

Chazal teach us that Moshe criticized *Bnei* Gad and *Bnei* Reuven for the prioritization of their values. They said they would build pens for their animals and cities for their children. They were implying that their livestock rated higher priority than their children. In Moshe *Rabbeinu's* response, he implied that they should respond first to the needs of their children, and only then take the necessary steps to care for their livestock. It is difficult to comprehend that such great people would place their livestock before their children. This is not a question of priorities - it represents sheer stupidity! It is true that some individuals are so obsessed with their pursuit of the mighty dollar that they tend to completely forget that they have children. These people, however, are not the norm. They certainly do not reflect the virtuous, "fine", decent and upstanding Jews that were represented by *Bnei* Gad and *Bnei* Reuven.

We suggest an alternative interpretation of the dialogue that ensued between Moshe and *Bnei* Gad and *Bnei* Reuven. There are people who want what they think is best for their children. They do not realize the meaning of "best". Well meaning parents will, at times, provide a strong Jewish education for their children only to end it prematurely when it conflicts with their secular pursuits. The concern and anxiety regarding "On what will they live?" is nothing more than a selfish and misguided perspective. These fine parents are prepared to exchange spiritual success for opulence. They are resolved to trade the blessings of Yaakov for a bowl of lentils. They talk about "providing" for their children's future when, in reality, they seem more concerned with securing their early fortune. Is this really providing for the children's future - or is it a shortcut to premature spiritual degeneration? *Bnei* Gad and *Bnei* Reuven were concerned for their children, but their demands implied that their primary interest was in material abundance. Although their material emphasis was for their children's benefit, it was nonetheless not spiritual in nature. It was the manner in which they presented their demands that emphasized their real priorities.

This writer once heard an insightful analogy that can be applied to the idea of setting appropriate structure to one's priorities in life. There was once a man who crossed the border daily between one country and another. He always passed through with the same item - a wheelbarrow filled with dirt. The inspectors suspected that he was smuggling something through, but although they tried they were not able to find any contraband. They searched the wheelbarrow; they sifted through the dirt and always came up with nothing. At wit's end and unable to contain his curiosity, one inspector asked the "smuggler," "On condition that I will not punish you, I ask you to inform me what it is that

you have been smuggling across the border." After receiving all assurances regarding his clemency, the "smuggler" responded, "Simply, I have been smuggling wheelbarrows across. While you have been looking through the dirt, you unwittingly ignored the most blatant and obvious thing - the wheelbarrow!"

This is the story of life. We waste our time and energy searching for the useless and meaningless, devoting ourselves to the worthless and insignificant, sacrificing ourselves and our children to the shallow and purposeless. If we open up our eyes, we might even notice that while we are searching and wallowing through the dirt -the wheelbarrows are escaping us!