

## "You shall prepare the way and divide the border of your land into three parts... that every murderer may flee there." (19:3)

In *Makos 10b* the *Talmud* states that each crossroads bore the sign "*miklat*," refuge, in order to guide the murderer toward the right direction to reach the *arai miklat*, cities of refuge. The *Ponevezer Rav z.l.* expounded on this *Chazal*. Why were directional signs provided only for the *rotzeach b'shogeg*, unintentional murderer? Why weren't signs likewise provided for the *oleh regel*, pilgrims who went up to *Yerushalayim* for *Yom Tov*? There should have been signs at the crossroads directing all Jew to the *Bais Ha'Mikdash*.

He responded in the following manner: Man, by nature, detests a murderer. One who has no respect for human life is the lowest, most contemptible creature in existence. This does not necessarily apply to the unintentional murderer. The murderer is undoubtedly considered not to be a normal member of the community. He is a parasite from whom people tend to distance themselves. This attitude lingers only as long as no one has "broken the ice" and has dealings with the murderer. If one were to speak to the murderer and to interact with him, his preconceived opinion would mellow, for this is the nature of proximity and its influence. Indeed, our contact with anything negative often overrides our skepticism towards it.

If one will come in contact with and speak to the murderer, his total disdain of him will slowly vanish to the point that he might even begin to justify his homicidal act. The *Torah* desires to isolate the murderer from the Jewish community as much as possible to guarantee that his image remain jaundiced in the eyes of the community. It was, therefore, necessary to erect signs showing where the nearest *ir miklat* was situated, in order to limit casual conversation with the murderer. Although this person has committed an unintentional act, for which he has not yet been tried by a Jewish court, the actual act of homicide must be disdained to the fullest extent.

Conversely, the people that went up to *Yerushalayim* for the three *regalim*, festivals, were individuals with whom social interaction was a constructive act. *Chazal* therefore, intentionally did not erect signs at the crossroads. Let the people meet and interact with these sublime individuals whose progressive endeavor would inspire others. This would ultimately involve more and more people in the *mitzvah* of *oleh regel*.

Involvement in a worthwhile and positive endeavor/organization has the power to effectively change an individual and transform his whole essence. On the other hand, contact with something evil can demoralize and destroy one's positive behavior.

We may suggest a different response to the disparity between *arai miklat* and *oleh regel*. The murderer is not running towards a goal/city. He is running away from his home. He can not think properly regarding where he is going. His only concern is getting away. This person needs focus and direction. The *oleh regel*, in contrast, has only one goal in mind, arrival at *Yerushalayim* and

the *Bais Ha'Mikdash*. His focus is defined. His course is steered and set on "auto pilot." He will not need signs to direct. He automatically gravitates towards his goal.

This may be a lesson for us. The one who knows where he is going, who has his sense of direction delineated, needs no signs. The one who is wandering aimlessly without any defined ambition might not even derive benefit from the signs, unless he looks for them -- he must know what to look for!