

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by **Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman** of the **New West End United Synagogue** in conjunction with **Shapell's/Darché Noam***

PARSHAT MATTOS-MASSAI

DVAR TORAH: YOUR MONEY OR YOUR CHILD?

At the beginning of every pidyon haben (redemption of the first born), the halachah mandates the following exchange between the Kohen and the father of the boy: The Kohen asks, "What would you rather have, your first born son or the five silver coins that you're obligated to give to redeem him?" The father responds, "I want this first born son, and here are the silver coins that I'm obligated to give." The interchange sounds strange, for what kind of father would rather take the money than the child?

The simple reason for this conversation is to make sure that the father gives over the expensive silver coins wholeheartedly. The coins are worth a lot, and they must be given to the Kohen with complete intention. But Rabbi Meshulam Isaac (Rav Meshulam) quotes an additional explanation:

This question – "What would you rather have, your first born son or the five silver coins that you're obligated to give to redeem him?" – is not only asked of the father on the day of the pidyon haben, but the parents are asked it over and over again as they raise their children. When they are presented with expenses that are necessary for proper chinuch (education) and they hesitate to take them on, the parents of the child are asked, "What do you want, your money or your child?" Are your priorities straight?

This message is brought out in the Parshat Hashavua. The tribes of Reuven and Gad have a lot of livestock. The land on the Eastern side of the Jordan is good grazing land, and they want to settle there. Moshe Rabbeinu tells them how important it is to cross the Yarden with the rest of the people and join their brothers in the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. They begin their response: "גדרות צאן ובנה למקננו וערים לטפינו" – "We will build pens for our animals and cities for our children and then go and fight" (Bamidbar 32:16). Rashi points out that the men of Reuven and Gad mention their animals – their property – before their children. Moshe Rabbeinu corrects them later and says: "בנו לכם ערים לטפכם וגדרות לצאנכם" – "Build cities for your children and pens for your animals" (Bamidbar 32:24). Get your priorities straight.

No one would suggest that if the tribes of Reuven or Gad were asked, "Would you rather have children or sheep?" they would say, "We'll take the sheep."

But Moshe, through his subtle correction of the order they mentioned their children and livestock, taught them and us an important lesson. We should internalize correct priorities deeply. They should be so much a part of us that they are naturally reflected in our speech, our choice of words and their order. If we internalize our priorities properly, when subtle conflicts come up, we'll respond to them correctly and make the right choices. When we're asked, "Your money or your child?" we'll answer, "My child."

SOURCE GUIDE: MURDER & EXILE

1. Why do the laws of murder appear in Parshat Masei? 2. Why does so much of the Torah's discussion of murder center around the cities of refuge? Along with answering these questions, this source guide – guided by the Maharal's ideas – addresses the special affect that murder has on the Land of Israel.

Note: Even though murder, simply put, refers to taking the life of a human being; there are a number of other activities our Sages considered murder-like. Some of them are: embarrassing a person; taking interest; stealing; and lashon hara (evil speech). The sources that follow might apply to these as well.

A. Murder and Exile

Kayin (Cain) murdered his brother Hevel (Abel), and was exiled:

<p>1. Bereishit 4:8-12 (8) Kayin said to Hevel his brother. And it came to be, when they were in the field, Kayin came up against his brother Hevel and killed him.(9) Hashem said to Kayin, "Where is Hevel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"(10) He said, "What did you do? The call of your brother's blood calls out to me from the earth." (11) Now, cursed are you, more than the earth that opened up its mouth to take your brother's blood from your hands.(12) When you work the earth, it will no longer continue to give forth its power to you. You will be a wanderer and an exile in the land.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">בראשית ד:ח-יב</p> <p>(ח) וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בְהִיּוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ: (ט) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל קַיִן אַי הֶבֶל אָחִיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי: (י) וַיֹּאמֶר מַה עָשִׂיתָ כֹּהֵל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן הָאֲדָמָה: (יא) וְעַתָּה אָרוּר אַתָּה מִן הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת פִּיהָ לְקַחַת אֶת דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ מִיָּדְךָ: (יב) כִּי תַעֲבֹד אֶת הָאֲדָמָה לֹא תוֹסֵף תֵּת כֹּחָהּ לָךְ נָע וָנָד תִּהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ.</p>
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Murder is also listed by the Mishnah as one of the four sins that bring about exile:

<p>2. Avot 5:9 ... Exile comes to the world because of idolatry, sexual promiscuity, murder, and [not keeping] the Shemittah of the Land.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">אבות ה:ט</p> <p>... גְלוּת בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם עַל עֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה, וְעַל גְּלוּי עֲרִיּוֹת, וְעַל שְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים, וְעַל הַשְּׁמִטָּה הָאֲרָצִי.</p>
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In our Parshah, the Torah speaks extensively about the accidental murderer who goes into exile:

<p>3. Bamidbar 35:11-12 (11) You shall designate cities for yourselves; they shall be cities of refuge for you, and a murderer who killed a person unintentionally shall flee there. (12) These cities shall serve you as a refuge from an avenger, so that the murderer shall not die until he stands in judgment before the congregation.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">במדבר לה:יא-יב</p> <p>(יא) וְהִקְרִיתֶם לָכֶם עָרִים עָרֵי מִקְלָט תִּהְיֶינָה לָכֶם וְנָס שָׂמָה רֹצֵחַ מִכַּף נַפְשׁוֹ בַּשְּׂגָגָה. (יב) וְהָיוּ לָכֶם הָעָרִים לְמִקְלָט מִגֹּאֵל וְלֹא יָמוּת הָרֹצֵחַ עַד עֲמֻדוֹ לִפְנֵי הָעֵדָה לְמִשְׁפָּט.</p>
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Even though the cities of refuge have a protective function – the accidental murderer is protected from those who might take revenge on the one who killed their relative – it is also a punishment. The murderer cannot leave the city of refuge until the death of the Kohen Gadol (the High Priest), regardless of whether anyone is chasing him. Murderers are punished with exile – why? The Maharal shares an idea:

<p>4. Maharal Chidushei Aggadot Makot 11a ... The murderer goes into exile because he killed and cut off the soul from the body; therefore he is cut off from the place he is planted and goes into exile ...</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">מהר"ל חידושי אגדות מכות יא.</p> <p>... מה שהרוצח גולה לפי שהרג וקצץ הנפש מן הגוף, ולכך הוא נקצץ מן נטיעתו והוא הולך בגלות.</p>
<p>5. Maharal – Netzach Yisrael, Chapter 7 For in truth a man is referred to as "the tree of the field," as it is written, "For is Man a tree of the field ...?" (Devarim 20:19). But he is an upside down tree, for a tree's roots are below, stuck in the ground; whereas Man's roots are above. For the soul is his root, and it is from Heaven ...</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">מהר"ל – נצח ישראל, פרק ז</p> <p>כי באמת האדם נקרא "עץ השדה", דכתיב (דברים כ, יט) "כי האדם עץ השדה", רק שהוא אילן הפוך, כי העץ שורשו למטה תקוע בארץ, ואילו האדם שרשו למעלה, כי הנשמה הוא שורש שלו, והיא מן השמים ...</p>

The murderer, who disconnected a man from his roots, must experience the dislocation of exile. We can now appreciate the sharp words of the prophet to Achav and Izevel, the evil king and queen of the northern kingdom. They wanted to expand the palace grounds by purchasing a plot of land near the palace. Navot the Yizraelite did not agree to sell the plot of land because it was in his family since the times of Yehoshua ben Nun. Achav and Izevel reacted by setting up a kangaroo court. Based on false testimony, they had Navot sentenced to death and took over his land. Hashem sent them a message through Eliahu Hanavi:

<p>6. I Melachim 21:17-18 (17) And the word of Hashem came to Eliahu the Tishbi saying, (18) "Arise and go down toward Achav the king of Israel, who is in Samaria. Behold, he is in Navot's vineyard where he has gone down to take possession of it. (19) You shall speak to him saying, 'So said Hashem, "Have you murdered and also inherited?" And you shall speak to him saying, 'Thus said Hashem; "In the place that the dogs have licked the blood of Navot, shall the dogs lick your blood, even yours!"</p>	<p>מלכים א' כא:יז-יט (יז) וַיְהִי דְבַר ה' אֶל אֱלִיָּהוּ הַתִּשְׁבִּי לֵאמֹר. (יח) קוּם רֵד לְקִרְיַת אַחְזָב מִלְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁמְרוֹן הִנֵּה בְּכַרְם נְבוֹת אֲשֶׁר יָרַד שָׁם לְרִשְׁתּוֹ. (יט) וְדַבַּרְתָּ אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר ה' הֲרָצַחְתָּ וְגַם יָרַשְׁתָּ וְדַבַּרְתָּ אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר ה' בְּמַקְוֹם אֲשֶׁר לָקְדוּ הַכְּלָבִים אֶת דַּם נְבוֹת יִלְקוּ הַכְּלָבִים אֶת דְּמֶךָ גַּם אֶתָּה.</p>
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You, Achav, cut off a man from his roots! Not only did you disconnect Navot from his soul-roots by killing him; you removed him from his roots in the Land of Israel! And now you think that through your murder you're going to be able to deepen your own roots in My Land?!

B. Murder and the Land of Israel

Based on the Maharal's ideas, exile is appropriate for all murderers. But, קל וחומר (all the more so) murder breaks the People of Israel's ability to stay in the Land of Israel:

<p>7. Rashi on Bamidbar 35:33-34 (33) And you shall not corrupt the land in which you live, for the blood corrupts the Land, and the blood which is shed in the Land cannot be atoned for except through the blood of the one who shed it. (34) And you shall not defile the land where you reside, in which I dwell, for I am Hashem Who dwells among the Children of Israel.</p>	<p>במדבר לה:לג-לד (לג) וְלֹא תִחַנְיֵפוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם בָּהּ כִּי הַדָּם הוּא יִחַנְיֵף אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא אֶרֶץ לֹא יִכַּפֵּר לְדָם אֲשֶׁר שִׁפַּךְ בָּהּ כִּי אִם בְּדָם שִׁפְכוֹ. (לד) וְלֹא תִטְמֵא אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יֹשְׁבִים בָּהּ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי שֹׁכֵן בְּתוֹכָהּ כִּי אֲנִי ה' שֹׁכֵן בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.</p>
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Murder removes the Divine Presence from the Land of Israel; and Israel is not able to last in the Land without the Divine Presence. The Maharal adds another reason that murder brings about exile from the Land of Israel:

<p>8. Maharal – Derech Chaim on Avot 5:9 The second (cause of exile) is murder. For, because the Land [of Israel] is called the "Land of Life," if blood is spilled in it, it is not fitting for them to be within it at all, because they spill blood in it and cause it not to be called the "Land of Life."</p>	<p>מהר"ל – דרך חיים על אבות ה:ט והשני שפיכות דמים כי מפני שהארץ נקראת ארץ החיים אם שופכים דמים בקרבה הרי אין ראוי שיהיו בארץ כלל אחר שהם שופכים דם בקרבה ואין נקראת ארץ החיים.</p>
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Our Parshah weaves murder into a discussion of the Land of Israel. Hashem tells us the borders of the Land and who will divide it up among the tribes. He tells us to set off forty-eight cities for the Leviim, then to set off six cities of refuge. Those cities of refuge have a dual function: they punish the accidental murderer with exile; and they protect the accidental murderer from getting killed by the angry family. This is the setting for the Torah's discussion of murder. Murder already appeared in Yitro in the Aseret Hadibrot (Ten Utterances, or Ten Commandments) and in Mishpatim where they are amplified upon. But in our Parshah avoiding and atoning for murder is built into the geography of the Land of Israel.

A LIVING LIFE BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

In Parshat Masei we learn about the ערי מקלט, cities of refuge for persons who unintentionally committed an act of murder. The Torah emphasizes that their purpose is so that he, the murderer, may live.

This turn of phrase serves as the basis for the Rambam's ruling (Laws of Murder 7:1): "If a student should be exiled to a city of refuge, we exile his rebbe with him. For it is written, 'For he shall flee to his refuge so that he may live' (Devarim 4:42)." And the Rambam explains: "For people who have attained wisdom and for those who seek it, a life without learning is a living death."

We all know that Torah is life. The Rambam teaches us here that the absence of Torah spells the death of a dimension of life which can only be activated by Torah.

Yesterday was Rosh Chodesh Av, which is the yahrzeit of Aharon Hakohen; and it is in Parshat Masei that we are told that Aharon Hakohen died on Rosh Chodesh Av. The author of the Kli Yakar (Harav Shlomo Efraim of Luntschitz, 1619-1550 זצ"ל) notes that it is not coincidental that the tragedy of Aharon's death took place in the same month as did the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. The Gemara teaches in Masechet Rosh Hashanah (28a) that the death of tzaddikim (righteous people) is equivalent to the burning of the House of our G d. Tzaddikim form the bridge between heaven and earth. And, as the Kli Yakar puts it, "The soul of the tzaddik contributes to the stability of the world's existence at least as much – if not more – than all the spirituality which prevailed in the Beit Hamikdash."

The Torah which is within the tzaddik is the life force of the world. And when a tzaddik like Aharon Hakohen in his generation, or the tzaddikim of subsequent generations, leave this world; the world begins to experience a life without life, what could be called a living death.

In these turbulent times, when the voices of tzaddikim are barely heard, when people who truly are alive are so few and far between, let us heed the call of the Torah. When your life is in danger flee to the city of refuge so that you may live. For us, that city of refuge is the yeshivah, the beit midrash, where the living Torah can be found in all its magnificence, and with it eternal life – והיי עולם נטע בתוכנו –

שבת שלום ומבורך

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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