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A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

פרשת מטות - מסעי

ויגשו אליו ויאמרו גדרת צאן נבנה למקננו פה וערים לטפנו. ואנחנו נחליץ חשים לפני בני ישראל וכו'.
(במדבר לב, טז-טז)
They approached him, and said, "Pens for the flock shall we build for our livestock and cities for our small children. We shall arm ourselves swiftly in the vanguard of Bnei Yisroel ..." (Bamidbar 32:16-17)

This week's *Sidrah* discusses how the *shevatim* of Gad and Reuven asked Moshe for permission to settle on the other side of the Yarden. Due to their abundant flocks and wanting more grazing pasture, they were interested in taking their portion there and not in Eretz Yisroel proper. Moshe initially reacted strongly, accusing them of abandoning their brethren and harming morale. However, after the two *shevatim* explained themselves, it became clear that they were not trying to avoid the upcoming battles for the land. They were willing to send their troops and take a leading role in the war until it was successfully concluded. Meanwhile, they wanted to settle their families and flocks on the other side of the Yarden until they would return and join them.

The *possuk* mentions that they requested וערים לטפנו פה וצאן נבנה למקננו. In an earlier *possuk* in Parshas Chukas (21:23), it states: ולא נתן סיחון את ישראל עבר בגבולו; ויאסף סיחון את כל עמו ויצא לקראת ישראל המדברה. *But Sichon did not permit Klal Yisroel to pass through his border, and Sichon assembled his entire people and went out against Klal Yisroel to the Midbar. He arrived at Yahaz and waged war against Klal Yisroel.* Rashi explains that this was a miraculous favour granted to Klal Yisroel, as they did not have to siege each city or wage multiple wars. Instead, Hashem put the idea in their minds to gather all the towns to battle Klal Yisroel. When they fell in battle, out in the open, Klal Yisroel easily conquered their towns and cities without facing resistance.

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* asks why Gad and Reuven needed to build cities for their children when there were already intact and unspoiled cities from Sichon and Og. The cities were still in existence, so why was it necessary for them to be rebuilt? Furthermore, why did they specifically request to build cities for their טפנו, *children*, and not for their wives who also remained behind when the men went to battle?

The Sifsei Kohen, (authored by a *talmid* of the Arizal,) explains that they destroyed the cities that were established by the nations of the land and then rebuilt them. When the Amorites built their cities, they did so to honour *avodah zarah*, as evident in the city's names (see Ramban 32:38). Therefore, the Yidden wished to rebuild them with *kedushah* and purity.

This understanding of the rebuilding helps explain why the *possuk* only mentions the rebuilding for the sake of the children. For the *chinuch* of the children it was vitally necessary to tear down the old buildings and start anew. At the beginning of their lives, children are more susceptible to outside

influences, and the negative atmosphere in those cities would have had a harmful effect on them. However, this was not as necessary for the women.

The importance of one's surroundings for spiritual growth is emphasised in the Chinuch in this week's *Sidrah (Mitzvah 408)* with regards to the *Arei Miklat*. He explains that one of the reasons why the unintentional killers were specifically exiled to the city of *Levi'im* was due to the *Levi'im's* elevated *madreigah*. Since they were not given a portion of the land, they were not spending time working the fields, and were totally occupied with spiritual matters and were dedicated to serving Hashem. Due to this exceptional status, even the ground they were living on became infused with *kedushah*. Therefore, their territory was chosen to offer possible atonement for accidental murderers.

Conversely, we learn of the devastating impact of bad environments in Parshah *Noach (6:12)*. The *possuk* states, וַיִּרְא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָרֶץ וַהֲבִיחָהּ וַיִּשְׁחָתָהּ, כִּי הִשְׁחִית כָּל בָּשָׂר אֶת דְּרָכָהּ עַל הָאָרֶץ, *And Hashem saw the earth and behold it was corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth*. Rashi, based on the Midrash, explains that כָּל בָּשָׂר, *all flesh*, refers even to animals, which had become corrupted by interbreeding across species. The immoral behaviour of the world's inhabitants polluted the air and defiled the land so much so that even the animals, incapable of sin, became tainted. For this reason, the Midrash also relates that during the *mabul*, the top three *tefachim* of soil needed to be removed and swept away to cleanse the earth from its spiritual pollution.

We should learn from the people of *Gad* and *Reuven* about the importance of the purity of our surroundings, especially for our most impressionable children. Their willingness to completely destroy intact cities and rebuild them for the sake of being built with *kedushah* demonstrates how crucial the right environments are for spiritual growth. May we be *zoche* to establish our homes and families in settings which are conducive and contribute most to *ruchniyus* growth.

This Devar Torah is adapted from ספר וענפיה ארזי אל עה"ת and is presented by the Gateshead Yeshiva Alumni Association. To receive by email, please register your interest by sending an email to parshasheet@yalumni.org.