

## Matos-Masei – Orei Miklot / Sharing Mitzvos - Mark Neuberger (reprinted)

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In Parshas Masei, the Torah instructs the Bnai Yisroel to establish six Orei Miklot. Three of the Orei Miklot are to be set up west of the River Jordan and three to the east where the two and a half tribes live. In addition to these specific cities, the forty-two cities set aside for the Leviim and Kohanim to reside in also served as Orei Miklot.

The purpose of the Orei Miklot is made very clear; "You shall designate cities for yourselves, cities of refuge shall they be for you and a killer shall flee there – one who takes a life unintentionally." If there is an accidental death, the closest relative of the victim has the right to kill the perpetrator unless he is inside an Ir Miklot. Once inside, he is safe until the Sanhedrin judges his case.

The obligation to set up Orei Miklot is repeated in Sedra Mishpotim. There the Torah writes; "You shall separate three cities for yourself. ....Prepare the ways for yourself.....and it shall be for any murderer to flee there. (Devorim 19) Rashi on these Possukim explains that "preparing the ways," tells us to ensure that it would be very easy for people to flee to an Ir Miklot. How would this be accomplished? By providing good roads and clear signposts. Rambam too, lists this as an obligation.

In the first Perek of Shekolim the Mishna states; "On the first of Adar, the Beis Din would alert people to bring their half shekolim, to check carefully that they were not going to plant Kelayim (forbidden mixtures) during the coming season and on the fifteenth of Adar they would read the Megillah in walled cities, repair the paths and highways and check the cisterns." The latter would be in honour of the crowds coming up to Yerushalayim for Pesach. The Bartenura adds that repairing the paths and highways, refers to making sure that the way to the Orei Miklot was clearly signposted. If the signposts had faded away during the winter rains, they had to be repainted. All for the sake of the accidental killer who has to flee quickly.

Surely, the emphasis here seems to be a little strange. There is great concern to ensure that directions to Orei Miklot are clear – for the odd occasion when there is a tragic, accidental death. However there is also an obligation to travel to Yerushalyim three times a year to be Oleh Leregel. This is in addition to other times when a Korbon had to be offered. We don't find anywhere this concern to make sure that signposts are clear showing the way to Yerushalayim. Surely that should also be a priority. I once heard a beautiful explanation of this apparent contradiction from Rabbi Shammai Zahn ZT"L, former Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Netzach Yisroel, Sunderland and Rov of Sunderland.

Consider the following scenario; a farmer is peacefully working in his field when suddenly he is approached by a dishevelled, distraught individual trying to find his way to the nearest Ir Miklot. He explains that he has accidentally caused a premature death and must now find his way to the Ir Miklot before he too is killed. The farmer quickly directs him and he dashes off hoping desperately to make the Ir Miklot in time. The farmer continues his work and later on that night relates the whole dramatic incident to his wife. The wife goes out in the evening and tells all her friends and neighbours about her husband's adventure and so the news spreads. What is the result? Everyone is talking about manslaughter, death and revenge. Is this what the Torah wants? Most definitely not. If someone is unfortunate enough to have to flee to an Ir Miklot, let him get there quickly and discreetly involving as few people as possible. Good roads and clear signposts will achieve this aim.

Now consider an alternative. A farmer is working in his field when a group joyfully making their way to Yerushalayim approaches him. There aren't however clearly marked roads and they are lost. The farmer gladly directs them and they tell him why they are going – maybe to offer up a thanksgiving offering or to bring their Bikkurim. This happy encounter makes an impression on the farmer. Later on that night he discusses it with his wife and they too decide to pay a visit to Yerushalayim. On their way they stop and ask directions and others are influenced to go.

From here we can learn an important principle. If you are doing a Mitzva, share it with other people, let them know about it and give them a chance to get involved. It could be a shiur you attend, a gemach in which you're involved a chessed that you do regularly. Tell others about it (not boastfully of course) and get them interested. You cannot tell how many others will be given the signpost towards that mitzvah.

May the day soon come when we all be asking the directions to the rebuilt Yerushalayim.