



South Head Youth Parasha Sheet

PARASHAT MASSEI



Parashat Massei opens with Hashem telling Moshe to write down all the places the Jewish people traveled through during the past forty years. He also asked Moshe to write down all the events and happenings that occurred during this time, the good and the not so good. Hashem wants the Jewish people to remember the times that they saddened Him, yet He forgave them. He also wants the Jewish people to always remember all the events and all the miracles He performed for them in each of these places. Moshe wrote down all of the names of the places the Jewish people traveled through, beginning with the Egyptian city of Ramses. It was at this town that the Jewish people gathered to begin their journey into the desert. In total, the Jewish people traveled through 42 places, with the final place before entering Israel being the plains of Moab.

Hashem tells Moshe to tell the Jewish people that they are required to observe certain Mitzvot to keep the land of Israel. One of the commandments the Jewish people must observe is to not settle among the seven nations who live in the land of Israel. Rather the Jewish people are commanded to drive these seven nations out of the land of Israel. The reason for this is because these seven nations worshipped idols. Hashem feared that if the Jewish people lived among them they would learn from their ways and they too would begin to worship idols. Moshe tells the Jewish people that if they listen to this commandment they will be able to stay in Israel, however if they do not drive out the seven nations from the land, the inhabitants will cause the Jewish people misfortune.

The Parasha also discusses the Ir Miklat. The Ir Miklat is a city of refuge. The Ir Miklat is a special city for people who accidentally killed another person. Here is an example of how a person might kill someone by mistake. Let's say that a man named David owns a big and beautiful orchard which grows delicious fruits. The orchard is too large for David to manage on his own and so he hires workers to pick the fruit off of the trees so that he can sell them. David often walks around the orchard to watch his workers work. One day, one of his workers is picking fruit off one of the beautiful trees and notices a dead branch on the tree and so he cuts it off so that it doesn't affect the rest of the tree. As the worker cuts the branch, David walks passed the tree and the heavy branch falls on his head, killing him. This is what the Torah calls an accidental death. Of course the relatives of the dead person want to avenge the blood of their relative and so the worker is in danger. To protect himself the worker runs to an Ir Miklat. Once inside the Ir Miklat, the relatives of the dead person are not permitted to touch him or harm him.

When a person arrived in the Ir Miklat, he would come before the Jewish court who would determine whether the person had killed on purpose or by accident. If the Jewish court ruled that the person killed another person on purpose then the Jewish court sentenced the man to death. The Jewish court would only rule a death as done on purpose if the murderer had been warned before performing the act and if the act was witnessed by two witnesses. If however, the Jewish court rules that the murder happened by accident then the person is permitted to remain in the Ir Miklat. In the Ir Miklat the murderer is safe from the Goel Hadam. The Goel Hadam, translated as 'the blood redeemer', is the victim's closest relative. He has the right to avenge his relative's blood and harm his relative's murderer in any place except in an Ir Miklat.

The Torah allows the Goel Hadam to slay the murderer for a very specific reason. According to the Torah the most serious sin a man can commit is murder. This is because most sins that a person might do toward his fellow man can be corrected. For example, if you steal

from a person you can return the goods, if you embarrass a person you can apologize and if you insulted a person you are able to apologise. However, if a person takes away another person's life, he can never give it back, Furthermore, if the person wasn't yet married or had not yet had children it means that the murderer has prevented generation from being born. So it is as if the murderer has killed all of these people because he has prevented them from coming into this world. A Biblical example of this is when Kayin murdered Abel. G-d said to Kayin, 'your brother's blood and the blood of all children that could have been born from him cried out to me from the ground'. Similarly, when a person kills another person, the victim's blood cried out to Hashem and demands that Hashem punish the murderer. This is the reason why the Torah allows the Goel Hadam to slay the murderer.

Even if a person accidentally kills another person, the victim's blood still cries out to Hashem asking Hashem to punish the murderer. The sages say that if the murderer had been a righteous man then he would never have killed the victim, not even accidentally. It is for this reason that the Goel Hadam has the right to punish him. However, since the



murder occurred without any evil intent, the murderer is able to escape to the Ir Miklat to be safe from the Goel Hadam. The murderer's punishment is that he must leave his home and live in a new place. He is required to live in the Ir Miklat until the serving Kohen Gadol passes away. This punishment atones for the murderer's sin. The reason the Kohen Gadol is involved is because it is the Kohen Gadol's responsibility to pray to Hashem that no misfortune befall the Jewish people. If a death occurs it therefore shows that the Kohen Gadol is somehow responsible and only his death can atone for the murder that was committed. It is for this reason that the murderers in the Ir Miklat would eagerly await the death of the Kohen Gadol in order that they could return home to their families and not worry about anyone harming them. Of course, the mother of the serving Kohen Gadol would be concerned that all the murderers would pray for her son's death and so she would provide food and drinks to the murderers. She wanted to make them feel comfortable and enjoy their stay in the Ir Miklat so that they would not pray for her son's death. It is interesting to note that if an unintentional murderer dies while living in the Ir Miklat, he is buried there and it is only after the Kohen Gadol passes away that his bones may be transferred to his family's cemetery.

The Parasha also speaks about the forty-eight cities in Israel that were given to the Levites. As the Levites were the Torah teachers of the Jewish people they were not given a portion of land in Israel. Instead, they were given forty-eight cities spread out all over Israel. Since there were cities of Levites throughout Israel, each neighborhood had its own Torah scholars. Hashem commanded that the cities of the levites must be surrounded by two thousand feet of open land. This land served to beautify the city and it was forbidden to plant on this land. When people would come to the cities of the Levites to learn Torah, they would see the beautiful landscape and this helped them honor their Torah scholars.

The list of places that Moshe recorded of the Jewish people's travels in the desert serves as encouragement for the Jewish people today. Following the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash the Jewish people became wanderers. There are thousands of places through which Jewish people have traveled in which they have been oppressed. We might think that Hashem has forgotten about how much the Jewish people are suffering, but this is not so. Just as Hashem told Moshe to write down each of the places in the desert, each stop of our exile is being recorded before Hashem in heaven. We are still not at the end of our journey. Hashem is purifying us in exile to prepare us for the coming of Moshiach, when Hashem Himself will redeem the Jewish people.

Mission of the week: Pray for the safety of our soldiers and our brothers and sisters in Israel!

It was great seeing you in Shule! We hope you enjoy reading this Parasha Sheet and quizzing your family! Shabbat Shalom from Brookie and the South Head Youth Crew.

