



Every person has to decide what will be the biggest determining factor in his life. That affects every major decision – parnossah, where to live, and certainly shidduchim.

A shidduch is probably the single most important decision a person makes at your stage of life. You're deciding what sort of life you're going to build, what sort of family you're going to build, and whether this is the person with whom you can build that life. Too often people get caught up in one minor cheshbon or another, instead of first asking: What kind of life do I want? Is this the person with whom I can build that life that I want?

When parents call me about a shidduch for their child, I ask them what kind of person they are looking for. And they tell me all kinds of interesting things! Sense of humor, etc. As if this is what life is all about! No, it's about what kind of life you want to build and what kind of family you want to raise. That's the first question.

And that's exactly what Moshe Rabbeinu was telling them: כְּנֹו לְכֶם עָרִים – First take care of your children. Then worry about your money.

There's a very interesting posuk. Yaakov Ovinu had been on the road, and after the whole ma'aseh with Shechem, the Torah says that he came to a place called Succos. Then it says that Yaakov built himself a bayis, and for his flock he made succos. Chazal tell us that this is connected to why we have Chag HaSuccos.

The Torah says he built a house for himself and shelters for his flock, and therefore he called the place Succos. Why name the place after the shelters rather than the house?

If you look in Targum Yonasan, he explains that Yaakov built himself a Beis Medrash. In other words, he established a permanent place for learning Torah, while for his flock he made only temporary shelters. What was Yaakov saying? "I'm settling my family here, and the most important thing is their Torah. I'll take care of the parnossah later, but first I establish a place of Torah." Because his priorities were correct, the place was called Succos.

Moshe Rabbeinu responded to the request in a very interesting way. He first told them: "Fine. If you straighten out your priorities and build cities for your families first, and then go fight for Klal Yisroel, you may remain here."

But suddenly another shevet enters the picture: וְיִסְרָאֵל יִשְׁכְּטוּ מִן־הַבְּיָהוּדִים. Where did they come from? The livestock belonged to Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven, not to Shevet Menashe.

Moshe Rabbeinu realized they needed something to help with their priorities. He brings in chatzi shevet Menashe. The Netziv in Ha'amek Dovor explains that Shevet Menashe made a very different calculation. Their ikkar was Torah. They understood that Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven were becoming wealthy, and someone would have to provide Torah leadership there, so they went to Ever HaYarden in order to be mekarev them and strengthen Torah among them.

As the Torah continues, Moshe Rabbeinu separates the sholosh orei miklot, and says that there will be three cities of refuge in Ever HaYarden and another three in Eretz Yisroel. Chazal ask a famous question: Nine and a half shevotim will live in Eretz Yisroel, while only two and a half will live in Ever HaYarden. So why are there three orei miklot on each side?

Chazal answer that there would be more retzicha b'shogeg in Ever HaYarden.

Now think about that. Why should there be more accidental killing in Ever HaYarden? Is the climate different? Is the water different? Is the population denser? No. Chazal are teaching a very deep idea.

Eretz Yisroel proper has a higher level of kedushas ho'oretz, while Ever HaYarden has a lower level of kedushas ho'oretz. Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven were not rejecting holiness altogether. They were saying, "Because of our wealth, we're willing to settle for a second-level kedushas ho'oretz."

Now Moshe Rabbeinu makes a very simple cheshbon. If a person is willing to accept second-class kedushah because of money, that means he doesn't take life seriously enough. If he truly understood what life is about, he wouldn't trade a higher level of kedushah for wealth. And if a person doesn't take life seriously, it leads to carelessness. And what is

retzicha b'shogeg? It is the result of carelessness.

This morning I was driving in Har Nof. In the morning it's not easy – children are running to school, balls roll into the street, and you have to be extremely careful. So I'm driving slowly and carefully. Suddenly someone behind me is leaning on his horn, zooms around me, and takes off.

That kind of behavior leads to retzicha b'shogeg! A person who doesn't take his own life seriously, also doesn't take other people's lives seriously. Chazal say: עַל חַי עֲצֻמוֹ אִינוֹ חָסִים, עַל חַי אַחֲרָיִם לֹא כָל שָׂכֵן

That's exactly what Moshe Rabbeinu was telling Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven. First you spoke about your money and only afterward about your family. Then you said you're willing to settle for a lower level of kedushah because of money. Once a person starts thinking that way, he stops taking life seriously enough in all kinds of areas.

And remember what they were doing. This wasn't a vacation. They crossed the Jordan River and fought for seven years straight while their families remained behind the entire time. But it was all worth it for them – because of all the money they would have in the end. Did they realize that in the meantime, a five-year-old child would be twelve by the time his father returned? They didn't care. They missed years of building their families because they were focused on the wealth they would ultimately gain.

The Torah establishes a basic level that every Jew is obligated to keep, and then higher levels of closeness to HaKodosh Boruch Hu. Rav Avrohom ben HaRambam writes in the Maspik that if a person wears shaatnez, he is called a rosho. Why? He's a nice person! Why should he be called a rosho? He explains with the posuk: לָמָּה רֹשָׁע יִלָּא וְיִשְׁלָמֶם. A rosho is someone who doesn't pay his debts.

HaKodosh Boruch Hu gives us everything. That means we owe Him a debt, and we repay that debt by keeping Shabbos, kashrus, shaatnez, and the rest of basic halochos. If a person wears shaatnez, he is refusing to pay part of that debt. So he is a rosho in the eyes of the Torah because he isn't keeping the basic requirements to pay his debt to Hashem.

But beyond the basics, every person decides how high he wants to climb in the ladder of closeness to HaKodosh Boruch Hu. It depends on your level of understanding of Hashem and inspiration.

When a person says, "I'll take care of my money, and I'll also take care of my children," Moshe Rabbeinu says: "What do you mean 'also'?" An eleven-year-old becomes an eighteen-year-old while you're gone. He's a different human being, and you had no input in those years! But it's worth it for the money?

So Moshe Rabbeinu's message was: if that's your attitude to life, you don't take life seriously enough. And when people don't take life seriously, retzicha b'shogeg becomes more common.

This entire story of Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven is a key lesson in decision-making in life. In the end, who were the first shevotim lost from Klal Yisroel? Bnei Gad, Bnei Reuven, and chatzi shevet Menashe. Why? Because they couldn't consistently distinguish between ikkar and tofel.

When people come to me for advice, the first question is always: What are your priorities? What's number one in your life? What's number two? What's number three? First maximize number one. Then work on number two. Then work on number three.

So many people make excuses and say, "I'm earning all this money for my children. It's not for me!" They're so busy earning money for the children, that they barely know their own children.

You're at a stage in life where you're deciding what your life will look like in twenty years, thirty years, forty years. There is an ikkar in life and there is a tofel in life. As a friend of mine, a great mechanech, once said: "Does the dog wag the tail, or does the tail wag the dog?" Sometimes the tail wags the dog. The tofel takes over and determines the ikkar.

That was Moshe Rabbeinu's message to Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven: you have all your priorities backwards. There will be more accidental murderers as a result of not taking life seriously. There's an ikkar and there's a tofel.

Life is very serious. Never make the mistake of Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven.