



**RABBI SHALOM**

**ROSNER**

RAV KEHILLA, OHEL EPHRAIM IN NOFEI HASHEMESH

MAGGID SHIUR, DAF YOMI, OU.ORG

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# The Road to Spiritual Exposure

Rabbi Norman Lamm<sup>1</sup> raises a striking question about two very different travelers described in the Torah: the *oleh regel* journeying joyfully to Jerusalem for the festivals, and the accidental killer fleeing to the *arei miklat*, the Cities of Refuge.

At first glance, one would expect the Torah to make the pilgrimage to Yerushalayim as smooth and welcoming as possible. After all, *aliyah laRegel* was among the great spiritual experiences of Jewish life. Yet Chazal describe no elaborate accommodations for these pilgrims.

Meanwhile, regarding the *arei miklat*, the Gemara teaches something remarkable: תָּכִין לָךְ הַדֶּרֶךְ - *You shall prepare the road for yourself*.<sup>2</sup> The roads to the Cities of Refuge were carefully marked with signs pointing travelers in the proper direction. The Gemara in Makkot<sup>3</sup> explains that signposts reading *Miklat*

were placed throughout the land to ensure that the accidental killer could quickly find refuge.

Why this apparent imbalance? Why were clear directions provided for the one who killed accidentally, while pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem were left to wander and ask for directions?

## THE EDUCATIONAL VISION OF CHAZAL

Rabbi Lamm suggests that this distinction was intentional and deeply educational. The Torah wanted Jewish society to maximize interaction with spiritually elevated people and minimize exposure to morally compromised behavior.

The *oleh regel* was not merely a traveler. He was someone willing to sacrifice comfort, convenience, and routine in order to stand before Hashem in Jerusalem. Such a person embodied dedication, idealism, and spiritual aspiration. Therefore, Chazal intentionally avoided creating a streamlined, isolated pilgrimage route. Instead, pilgrims would stop in villages, ask for directions, enter homes, and interact with families along the way. Jewish children would meet these travelers and witness their devotion firsthand. The roads themselves became instruments of *chinuch*. The pilgrim spread kedushah not only by arriving in Jerusalem, but by traveling toward it.

## WHY THE MURDERER WAS DIFFERENT

The accidental killer, by contrast, represented a different kind of influence. Although the Torah distinguishes sharply between intentional murder and accidental killing, the *rotze'ach b'shogeg* was nevertheless not entirely

1. Rabbi Norman Lamm, Drashot L'Dorot

2. Devarim 19:3

3. Makkot 10b

Mazal Tov to  
**Noki & Naami Ganz**  
and family on the Bar Mitzvah  
of their son, **Gamliel**



blameless. Chazal emphasize that *shogeg* is not the same as *ones*, an unavoidable accident. A person who kills unintentionally often bears some degree of carelessness or negligence. Something in his conduct required correction.

For this reason, society was not meant to normalize or romanticize his presence. The Torah's concern was not only legal protection, but spiritual protection. The roads to the *arei miklat* were designed to move him quickly and quietly away from public life. The Torah recognizes a profound truth: environments shape people.

### THE POWER OF SPIRITUAL EXPOSURE

Modern culture often assumes that the healthiest approach is total exposure. Children and adults alike should encounter every ideology, every influence, and every form of culture in order to become sophisticated and resilient. Rabbi Lamm respectfully challenges this assumption.

Certainly, one cannot live in fear or isolation. Yet Judaism insists that what we expose ourselves to matters profoundly. The sights we see, the sounds we hear, the conversations we normalize, and the values we absorb all leave impressions upon the soul.

The Rambam writes:

דרך ברייתו של אדם להיות נמשך בדעותיו ובמעשיו  
אחר רעיו וחבריו

*It is part of human nature for a person to be influenced in his character and actions by his friends and associates.*<sup>4</sup>

Human beings are porous. We absorb our surroundings. Therefore, the Torah seeks to

surround people with what is constructive, elevating, and spiritually healthy.

We live in an age of unprecedented access. Torah learning has become available instantly and globally. A person can study virtually any topic, in any language, at any hour of the day.

At the same time, the barriers protecting moral and spiritual life have weakened dramatically. Every value system, every temptation, and every form of distraction can enter the home with the click of a button. Technology itself is neutral; the question is what roads we choose to travel. Will we construct pathways that lead toward Jerusalem, or roads that pull us away from holiness?

### SHOFTIM VESHOTRIM: GUARDING THE GATES

Next week's *parasha* begins with שְׁפָטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים תִּתֵּן לָךְ - *judges and officers shall you appoint for yourself*.<sup>5</sup> The Chassidic masters often explain that this command applies not only to society, but to the individual. Every person must place *guards* at the gateways of life, especially one's eyes,

ears, mouth, and heart.

We must ask: What influences are entering our inner world? Which voices shape our thinking? Which values are we allowing into our homes and our souls? Spiritual greatness rarely emerges suddenly. It is built gradually through the roads we travel and the environments we cultivate.

The Torah teaches that journeys matter. Not only destinations, but roads. The *oleh regel* transformed the Jewish people simply through his presence along the way to Jerusalem. His very travel became an act of inspiration. The *rotze'ach*, meanwhile, was quietly



4. Rambam, Hilchot De'ot 6:1

5. Devarim 16:18

redirected away from society so that destructive influence would not spread.

Every day, we too travel roads. These paths are physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. We choose what enters our minds, whom we admire, what we watch, what we celebrate, and what kind of people we become. In the weeks leading toward Elul and the *Yamim Noraim*, the Torah asks us to become architects of our inner world. To place signposts toward holiness. To create homes filled with Torah, kindness, dignity, and meaning. To always remember that the influences we welcome today shape the people we become tomorrow.

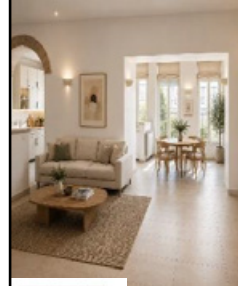
May we merit to walk the roads that lead to Yerushalayim, remain on paths of *kedushah*, growth, and closeness to Hashem and may our journeys inspire all those we meet along the way. ■



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