

Lesson 12 – Perek 4:41-43 Cities of Refuge

Background:

This paragraph is the only section presented in a narrator's voice from 1:6 until 26:19. This is not part of Moshe's speech but rather is presented, like stories in the other four books of the Torah, from a third person narrator's perspective.

Activity:

Review the concept of cities of refuge as punishment for unintentional manslaughter.

Ask: What is so important about these cities of refuge that we need to interrupt the flow of Moshe's two speeches to be informed that he established these cities?

Make sure students understand why this paragraph sticks out from the surrounding speeches. Let them try to think of answers on their own.

Debarim Rabbah provides several interesting and creative answers to this question.

Answer #1 - Write the following quote on the board:

"He who has eaten of the dish knows how it tastes."

- Midrash Debarim Rabbah.

Ask students if anyone can figure out how this quote answers the question.

Moshe knows what it feels like to be pursued by someone who wants to take revenge for a homicide. Moshe's very first action was to kill an Egyptian who was beating a Jew. (Although this was not accidental homicide, Moshe was justified in killing the Egyptian under those circumstances.) Pharaoh wished to take revenge by killing Moshe but Moshe was saved by running away. Moshe's last action parallels his first. As his final act before dying, Moshe acknowledges how his life was saved way back and provides the same kindness for others by building cities of refuge to save the lives of accidental killers.

Answer #2 –

Ask: What is the definition of addiction?

Here's Miriam Webster's definition: **ad·dic·tion:** compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance characterized by tolerance and by well-defined physiological symptoms upon withdrawal.

Ask: What kinds of things are people generally addicted to?

Drugs, smoking, alcohol, money, sex, television...

Now read this Midrash:

Addicted to Good:

Moshe's Last Actions - Cities of Refuge

מדרש דברים רבה פרשה ב:כו

אז יבדיל משה
זשי"ה (קהלת ה:ט) אוהב כסף לא ישבע כסף. אין אנו יודעים שאין אדם ממלא את נפשו מהו בכסף?
A. רבנן אמרי אלו תלמידי חכמים שאוהבין דברי תורה שנמשלו בכסף שנא' (משלי טו:טז) וקנות
ביתו נבחר מכסף א"ר נחמן מי שאוהב תורה אינו שבע תורה...
B. ד"א אוהב כסף א"ר יצחק מי שהוא אוהב מצות אינו שבע מן המצות כיצד? את מוצא שני גדולי
עולם דוד ומשה ולא שבעו,
1. דוד אע"פ שא"ל הקב"ה (דברי הימים ב:ט) רק אתה לא תבנה לי את הבית הזה הנה היה דוד
אומר לעצמו וכי מפני שאמר לי הקב"ה אתה לא תבנה לי הבית אני יושב, מה עשה? זירז את עצמו
והתקין כל צרכיו עד שלא מת מניין שנאמר (דברי הימים א:כב:יד) והנה בעניי הכינותי לבית אלהי,
2. וכן משה אע"פ שאמר לו הקב"ה כי לא תעבור את הירדן הזה אמר משה אני עובר מן
העולם ואיני מפריש להם ערי מקלט
מיד אז יבדיל משה.

Midrash Devarim Rabbah 2:26

THEN MOSES SEPARATED.

This bears out what Scripture says, "He who loves silver will never be satisfied with silver" (Kohelet 5:9). Don't we already know that people are never be satisfied? What then is the force of the words, "With silver"?

A. The Rabbis said: This verse refers to scholars who love the words of the Torah which is compared to silver, as it is said, "To acquire knowledge is better than silver" (Mishle 16:16). Rabbi Nahman said: He who loves Torah can never have enough Torah...

B. Another explanation: "He who loves silver..." Rabbi Yizhak said: He who loves the mitzvot can never have enough of them. How so? You find that two great people of the world, David and Moses, could never have enough of them.

1. Although God said to David, "You shall not build this house for me" (Divrei haYamim 2 6:9), yet David said to himself, "Just because the Holy One, blessed be He, said 'You will not build this house for me', can I sit still?" What did he do? Before he died, he busied himself with the preparation of all the necessary materials for [the Temple] before he died, as it is said, "Now, behold, in my suffering I have prepared for the house of the Lord" (Divrei haYamim 1 22:14).

2. And so it was too with Moses. Although God had said to him, "You shall not go over this Jordan" (Devarim 3:27), yet Moses immediately exclaimed, "Shall I then depart this world without setting aside cities of refuge?"

Therefore, THEN MOSES SEPARATED.

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The Midrash says that you can be addicted not only to harmful things, but also to learning Torah and doing Mitzvot. So, addiction in itself is not a bad thing; it just depends to what you're addicted. Has anyone in the class ever felt addicted to a good thing?

How does this answer the question about why we are told about Moshe designating the cities of refuge?

Moshe was addicted to doing good. Moshe loved to lead the nation and wanted to do as much as he could. He felt bad that he would not be able to settle the people in the land so he wanted to at least start by settling cities of refuge on the East bank.

Moral 1 לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא אתה בן חורין ליבטל ממנה-

Moral 2 – Doing good deeds can become addictive once you get into it.

For homework: Each student should print up a Chief Rabbi's Warning label to be placed on addictive actions. For example, this label should be placed on every Humash:

Chief Rabbi's Warning: Research has shown that Humash contains extremely powerful ideas. Learning may decrease immaturity and may impregnate your mind with complex thoughts. Studying by teenagers may result in curiosity about many important questions which will can lead to even more studying.