



**A Rebuke at the Dead of Night**  
**Parshas Matos-Masei**

It was a cold and wet Jerusalemite night, yet many people had come to visit the home of Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld, one of the leading rabbis of his time - including some whom you would not have expected to find at a rabbi's home.

One unique such visitor, was a man who was known to be a member of the Zionist establishment. Rabbi Zonenfeld was studying at the time, but stopped his learning to hear the story the man wish to tell.

One of the city's leaders had fallen ill and was hospitalized in a missionary hospital in the city. When his situation deteriorated his family asked to move him to a Jewish hospital, but Jewish hospital refused to accept him after they heard where he had previously been admitted. He asked that Rabbi Zonenfeld intervene on behalf of patient.

Despite his old age and the cold, Rabbi Zonenfeld put on his coat and went out to see what he could do.

When he entered the hospital he saw the doctor, a man with whom he was well acquainted – and rebuked him: "Since when do you decide on life and death?" he said, and demanded that the patient receive appropriate treatment.

\*\*\*

In our weekly parsha we read about the cities of refuge established by Moshe. "You shall designate cities for yourselves; they shall be cities of refuge for you, and a murderer who killed a person unintentionally shall flee there. These cities shall serve you as a refuge from an avenger, so that the murderer shall not die until he stands in judgment before the congregation."<sup>1</sup>

The Sabah of Kelm learns from here that the Torah is teaching that one should try to benefit everyone, even an unintentional killer.

In the Talmud we learn: "Rabbi Simlai gave the following exposition: What is the meaning of the verse, "He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver, and he who is delighted in multitude, not with increase?" 'He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver', might be applied to our Master Moshe, who, while knowing that the three cities beyond the Jordan would not harbor refugees so long as the other three in the land of Canaan had not been selected, nevertheless said: The charge having come within my reach, I shall give effect to it, now!"<sup>2</sup>

Moshe chose to give hope to the killers, and G-d commended him for that.

The Sabah of Kelm explains that one who arrives at a state at which he had unintentionally killed is at a low spiritual level. Even one who is at the lowest state has a place in the world, and in this case it is at the cities of refuge. Even one who has unintentionally killed can ultimately find some repentance.

We are taught that a court is commanded to seek merit for anyone brought before it.

The message is the same: we must find merit in anyone, even one at a low spiritual state and even a transgressor.

\*\*\*

Rabbi Zonenfeld never expected to be repaid for his good deeds, he would just say: "We are commanded to do our part, to sacrifice ourselves for every Jew."

---

<sup>1</sup> Bamidbar 35:11-12.

---

<sup>2</sup> Tractate Makot 10a.