

## Neighborly Feelings

Rabbi Rosner

Prior to going off to war, the Kohen would exempt certain individuals from battle and allow them to return home. In particular, the Torah exempts those who recently (i) built a home, (ii) planted a vineyard or (iii) married, and have not yet had the opportunity to enjoy their home, vineyard, or wife, respectively. The reason behind this exemption seems to be that it will be difficult for an individual that has a new home, vineyard or wife to focus on the battlefield. He cannot be successful in battle when **חצי גופו נשאר בביתו** [Language of Rav Menachem Habavli Mitzvah 342]. However, if one looks closely at these pesukim (Devarim 20:5-7), it appears that there is a superfluous phrase, repeated three times. At the end of each of these pesukim, we are told that these individuals may return home lest they be killed "v'ish acher yikachena" – and another individual will enjoy the fruits of your labor, his house or his wife. What is the Torah trying to emphasize? He shouldn't go to war, because he cannot concentrate properly! What does that have to do with the other fellow?

Rashi posits that this phrase highlights the agmas nefesh that one would encounter knowing that another individual reaps the benefits of my hard work. What is Rashi driving at? Rav Raphael Pelcovitz (TableTalk) suggests an answer, based on a story that happened in Brisk. There was a shochet who approached Rav Simcha Zelig, the

chief dayan of Brisk, with a question about a particular cow that he had slaughtered. He wasn't sure if it was a treifa or not. The dayan inspected the cow and determined that it was treif. The butcher, being a yerei shamayim, disposed of the cow, notwithstanding the loss of more than six hundred rubles. Three weeks later, the same butcher appeared before the beis din in connection with a dispute that he had with a customer. It involved a miniscule sum of ruble. Reb Simcha Zelig ruled against the butcher again. This time, the butcher was furious and embarrassed Reb Simcha Zelig by cursing him in front of all those in the court. Reb Chaim Soloveichik, who was also present, demanded that the butcher leave at once, for embarrassing the Dayan.

Following the commotion, Reb Simcha Zelig turned to Reb Chaim, and says, "Three weeks ago, I ruled his cow was treif and he did not express any regret with having to dispose of a cow worth six hundred rubles. Now, he loses a small sum and gets so agitated? I don't understand?!" Reb Chaim explained - in the first case, with respect to a determination of whether or not the cow was kosher, there was a loss to the butcher, but no one else gained from his loss! However, in the second case, not only did the butcher lose, but the customer won. It hurt the butcher more knowing that he had to pay someone who he felt did not deserve the money. He would rather throw out a larger sum of money than have to pay another whom he felt was undeserving.

We often see similar behavior by young

children. As long as nobody gets a treat, then it is acceptable. But if I lose and someone else wins, that's unbearable. That's agmas nefesh, what Rashi is trying to teach us.

Returning now to our original question. Rav Pelcovitz explains: The Torah is reflecting the psyche of the average person. As one falls in battle, it is this realization in his last moments which pains him the most. Not only will he not enjoy his new home, his vineyard or his bride, but someone else will! Hashem, in his infinite wisdom, knows that such is the nature of man, and the Torah therefore commands us to spare him the greatest of all heartbreaks. Such a person is excused from battle for God understands the frailty of man, and demonstrates his compassion by excusing these men from army service. It is best for us to try to overcome this feeling and to not be bothered by another's gain. Everyone gets exactly what is in store for them, and we have to do what we can to be mesamech b'chelkainu.