

## **Choice Exile (Vaetchanan)**

***The real community of man, in the midst of all the self-contradictory simulacra of community, is the community of those who seek the truth, of potential knowers... of all men to the extent that they know.***

*-Allan Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind*

Moses, in one of his final acts as leader of Israel, prepares the Cities of Refuge on the eastern side of the Jordan River. The Cities of Refuge are a peculiar institution, basically allowing an inadvertent murderer a sanctuary, a haven from the Blood Redeemer, the relative of the victim who has the legal right to kill the murderer.

As such, by going into the exile of a different city, a different location, a different community, the accidental murderer saves himself and prolongs his life. The exile to the City of Refuge can even be seen as giving new life to the murderer.

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Prague, the Kli Yakar, 1550-1619, on Deuteronomy 4:41, sees such exile in a positive light and ties the concept of exile to a famous dictum from the Mishna (Ethics of our Fathers 4:14):

***“Exile yourself to a community of Torah.”***

The Kli Yakar claims that just as a City of Refuge provides life-giving sustenance to the murderer, so too, a city or community of Torah, a place that reveres the word of God, provides life-giving sustenance to a person.

May we ‘exile’ ourselves to communities of Torah and appreciate and support the communities that make it so.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

*Dedication*

*To the transition from the mourning of 9<sup>th</sup> of Av to the celebration of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Av.*