

Dvar Torah by **Rabbi Chanoch Yeres**

to his community at

Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

Graciously shared with PhiloTorah

Matot-Mas'ei

LO TACHANIFU ET HAARETZ... "Do not defile the land upon which you are, for bloodshed defiles the land, nor will the land find atonement for the blood which has been shed upon it." (Bamidbar 35:33)

Here, at the final chapters of the Book of Bamidbar, Moshe Rabbeinu reminds the people of the horrendous act of murder and manslaughter. The warning here is not just about murder but also about any shedding of blood even without intention to kill, like negligence or by accident. Out of all prior commands or prohibitions, why does Moshe choose this one to emphasize again? Why does Moshe choose this moment on the border of Israel to intertwine this act of shedding blood with the entrance to the land?

The Torah seems to paint a picture, not only of the sanctity of human life but also the harmony of human life with Creation. Many Jewish sources point to the importance of caring for this earth. The Torah provided us with laws of how to plant, how to harvest and even how to let the earth rest. Judaism seems to put value on caring for the earth. The word for Man in the

Torah is ADAM, originating from the word ADAMA, earth. The Torah begins with the creation of Mankind for the main purpose of working the earth and safeguarding it. From this interlocking connection, we can assume that the verses in this week's Parsha, which command us not to defile the earth through bloodshed, teach us a deeper message. By spilling innocent blood, we upset the sensitive balance of harmonious existence. Thereby, concluding that any sin, according to Jewish theology is not only disobedience to G-d but also unravels the harmony that exists between man and earth. From the beginning, Adam's sin led to harsh work on the land, not always reaping its fruit. Kayin's sin led to exile from his land to become a nomad. Sin causes a rift, not only between man and G-d but also between man and his natural environment. Committing evil causes a detachment from nature itself. Acts like murder, idolatry and immorality defined in the Torah as TUM'AH - acts of defilement, pollute the land.

Standing at the border of the land of Israel, Moshe reminds us to value the land we are about to enter. We must be careful to preserve and watch over its cleanliness, both physical and spiritual. When man sins, the land suffers. The Torah even described in its rebuke that when Israel sins, the land will expel us. The analogy of the

Torah is like a person who ingested poison; the body will vomit it out.

This message is all too poignant during the days preceding Tish'a b'Av, when we literally were expelled from our beloved Jerusalem and Land of Israel due to our sins. Moshe words in this Parsha seems to be more a prophecy than a warning. 🚫