**Parashat Masei**

Parashat Masei introduces the *mitzva* known as *arei miklat*, or "cities of refuge," requiring *Am Yisrael* to designate cities as places where inadvertent killers will be granted asylum and protection from the victim's relatives (chapter 35). Maimonides lists this obligation in his *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* as one of the six hundred and thirteen Biblical commands (*mitzvat asei* 182).

At first glance, as noted by Rabbi Yerucham Perlow, in his commentary to Saadia Gaon's listing the *mitzvot*, Maimonides' inclusion of *arei miklat* among the six hundred thirteen *mitzvot* violates his own guidelines that he establishes in the introduction to *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*. In the third of the fourteen rules (often called "*shorashim*") that Maimonides presents concerning the classification of the Biblical commands, he asserts that any law that applied only temporarily is not to be listed as one of the 613 *mitzvot*. For example, we read in Parashat Matot (chapter 31) of God's command to *Benei Yisrael* to wage war against Midian to avenge that nation's role in the tragic incident of *Ba'al Pe'or*. Since this command applied only once, it should not be listed as one of the Torah's six hundred and thirteen *mitzvot*. Seemingly, the same can be said about *arei miklat*. God here instructs *Benei Yisrael* to designate six cities (35:14), three of which Moshe set aside before his death, on the eastern banks of the Jordan River (Devarim 4:41), while the other three were designated during the time of Yehoshua, after the conquest of Canaan (Yehoshua, chapter 20). This appears to have satisfactorily completed the obligation of *arei miklat* as God had instructed, and thus this *mitzva*, which no longer imposes any demands upon the Jewish nation, seems undeserving of a separate entry in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*.

The answer emerges from two aspects of *arei miklat* that Maimonides mentions in defining this *mitzva*. Both in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* and in *Mishneh Torah* (Hilkhot Rotzei'ach 8:5), Maimonides defines this obligation as requiring not only the designation of the cities of refuge, but also ensuring their accessibility. The authorities bear the obligation of constructing and maintaining suitable roadways leading to the cities, including erecting bridges where necessary, and placing signs to enable the inadvertent killer to reach his destination without delay. Furthermore, Maimonides writes (Hilkhot Rotzei'ach 8:4) that in the Messianic age, the Jewish people's territory will expand, and we will thus be required to designate an additional three cities as *arei miklat*. Clearly, then, the practical obligations entailed by the *mitzva* of *arei miklat* did not end with the initial designation of the six cities during the times of Moshe and Yehoshua, and Maimonides thus justifiably includes this *mitzva* in his listing of the Biblical commands.

Maimonides' comment concerning the obligation to designate additional *arei miklat* during the Messianic age is consonant with his general approach to the nature of the Messianic era. He famously comments in Hilkhot Melakhim (12:1): "Let it not cross your mind that in the time of the Messiah anything from the world's natural course will be suspended, or there will be some innovation in creation. Rather, the world will follow its natural course." Maimonides describes the Messianic era as one where there will be no war or hunger, where food and wealth will be readily available. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that the natural course of the world will continue, and societies will still be required to work towards achieving stability and peace. Even the law of *arei miklat*, a law that is intended to restore calm after a tragic incident, will remain in effect.

According to Maimonides, when we pray for the restoration of the Temple service and the Davidic dynasty, we pray not for a world where peace and prosperity magically abound, but rather a world where *Am Yisrael* are given the opportunity to achieve peace and prosperity through their own hard work and through their unwavering observance of the Torah.