



RESPONSIBILITY STARTS AT THE TOP

How did the High Priest become responsible for an unintentional killing, and what can this teach us about the responsibility spiritual leadership bear for the people?

TEACHER'S MANUAL



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PARSHAT MATOT-MASEI

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The Torah commands that a person who accidentally kills another must flee to a city of refuge, where he will be protected from the family members of the victim who might seek revenge (Source 1).

The Sefer HaChinuch provides three reasons for this punishment of exile (Source 2).

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The killer remains in the city of refuge until the death of the reigning High Priest (Source 3a). For this reason, the mothers of the High Priests would provide food and clothing to the killers, so they would not pray for their son's death (Source 4).

Why is the release of the killer connected to the High Priest's death? Rashi explains:

A. The High Priest's role is to draw down the Divine Presence and increase life among the Jewish people, while the killer has done the opposite. Therefore, they shouldn't be in the same place.

B. The High Priest should have prayed that such a tragedy not occur (Source 3b).

Some commentators explain Rashi's second reason as follows:

The High Priest bears some responsibility for the killing because he did not properly pray for the Jewish people. As a consequence, the killers pray for his death to be freed from exile—and that, in itself, is considered part of the High Priest's punishment.

However, the Rebbe asks:

Rashi never actually mentions that the killer prays for the High Priest to die. Moreover, causing such prayers doesn't seem to be the Torah way.

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Rashi's explanation aims to address two primary questions:

A. The purpose of the cities of refuge is to protect the accidental killer from the avenger. So why does that protection end when the High Priest dies?

B. Naturally, the anger of the avenger should subside with time, as Rebecca told Jacob (Source 5). So why tie the killer's exile to the death of the High Priest, which could take many years?

The explanation:

Exile to the city of refuge is not just for protection—it also serves as punishment and atonement for the act of killing. When the High Priest dies, his death brings atonement for the sin of murder. As we find in other places, the death of the righteous atones for sin (Source 6). Therefore, at that point, the killer may return home.

Why is it specifically the High Priest's death that atones, more so than the death of any righteous person?

Rashi explains: The High Priest has both the power and the responsibility to pray that tragedies like this do not happen. Since the killing occurred nonetheless, he bears a degree of responsibility. Therefore, his death serves as the appropriate atonement for the killer.

This teaches us a profound message about Ahavat Yisrael—love of our fellow Jews.

The High Priest, the most exalted person, and the accidental killer, considered the lowest, are still interdependent. This teaches us of the importance of unity and mutual responsibility between all members of the Jewish people.

Introduction

Within the Torah's legal system, there is a unique institution of "cities of refuge" designed to address cases of accidental killing. One who kills unintentionally is held responsible by the Torah for his actions, and is sent into exile in a city of refuge to atone for what he has done. However, he doesn't go alone.

In this lesson, we will explore the central role of the High Priest in the atonement of the accidental killer and discover how the love for our fellow Jews creates a deep and special connection between two people who, at first glance, seem completely distant from one another.

השיעור לפרשת מטות מסעי

חלקים משיחת שבת פרשת מטות-מסעי, ה"תשל"ד

לקוטי שיחות חלק ל"ג, עמוד 206

בעיבוד קל

A. Cities of Refuge for Accidental Killers

A city of refuge is one of the most unique commandments in the Torah. Such a concept does not exist in other legal or religious systems.

Here's an example:

A 40-year-old man helped his friend carry a refrigerator down the stairs of their building. The refrigerator slipped from their hands, fell on the helper's head, and he was killed instantly. This is a classic case of causing death through negligence.

Now imagine that the refrigerator's owner was fully at fault for what happened. He was supposed to tie the refrigerator securely, but he acted carelessly and failed to do so. What is his sentence?

In modern legal systems, killing through negligence is usually not treated as a severe crime. Under U.S. law, sentences may range from a year to ten years in prison, and families may be entitled to financial compensation from the perpetrator. But the Torah presents an entirely different approach.

On the one hand, the Torah treats an act of killing very seriously, even if unintentional. The killer is considered liable for death. He acted carelessly and irresponsibly, leading to the loss of a life, and he deserves to die himself. This is not a natural disaster that could not have been prevented. It is a severe case of negligence—something that could have been avoided with a degree of caution and respect for the sanctity of life.

For this reason, the victim's family member is permitted to "redeem the blood" and avenge the death.

On the other hand, the Torah provides the killer with a way to protect himself from the death penalty, by fleeing to a city of refuge. He is exiled to one of the six designated cities of refuge in the Land of Israel, where he is shielded from death. As long as he remains within the city limits, the avenger is forbidden from harming him. If the avenger kills him, the avenger is considered a murderer. But if the killer leaves the city—even for a moment, for any reason—the avenger is allowed to kill him on the spot.

Source 1 Numbers 35: 9-12; 16; 22-27

Student's
pg. 1

G-d spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the children of Israel and tell them: When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, you shall designate cities for yourselves. These

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר, "דַּבֵּר
אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם,
כִּי אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן אֶרְצָה
בְּנֶעְזְו. וְהִקְרִיתֶם לָכֶם עָרִים, עָרֵי

shall be cities of refuge, and one who kills unintentionally shall flee there. These cities will serve as a refuge from the avenger, so that the killer will not die before standing judgment before the congregation...

If he struck him with an iron instrument and he dies, he is a murderer, and the murderer shall be put to death...

But if he pushed him accidentally, without malice, or threw an object at him without intent... yet he was not his enemy and bore him no hatred, then the congregation shall judge between the killer and the avenger of blood, according to these laws.

The congregation shall protect the killer from the hand of the avenger of blood and return him to the city of refuge to which he had fled. He shall remain there until the death of the High Priest, who was anointed with the sacred oil. But if the killer goes beyond the border of the city of refuge to which he had fled, and the blood avenger finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the blood avenger slays the killer, he has no blood."

מקלט תהינה לכם, ונס שמה רצח – מכה נפש בשגגה. והיו לכם הערים למקלט מגאל, ולא ימות הרצח עד עמדו לפני העדה למשפט...
ואם בכלי ברזל הכהו וימת – רצח הוא, מות יומת הרצח...
ואם בפתע בלא איבה הדפו, או השליך עליו כל כלי בלא צדקה... והוא לא אויב לו ולא מבקש רעתו. וישפטו העדה, בין המכה ובין גאל הדם על המשפטים האלה.
והצילו העדה את הרצח מיד גאל הדם, והשיבו אתו העדה אל עיר מקלטו אשר נס שמה, וישב בה עד מות הכהן הגדל, אשר משח אתו בשמן הקדש. ואם יצא יצא הרצח את גבול עיר מקלטו אשר ינוס שמה. ומצא אתו גאל הדם מחוץ לגבול עיר מקלטו, ורצח גאל הדם את הרצח – אין לו דם."

How are the Cities of Refuge created?

G-d commanded Moses to designate six cities to serve as cities of refuge. The southern city chosen was near Hebron. The northern city was Kadesh, located between the modern areas of Tzfat and Haifa. In the center of the country, the city of Shechem was designated. Alongside these three, another three cities of refuge were established on the eastern side of the Jordan River. The locations were selected to ensure equal accessibility for all residents of the land.

Accessibility was a central concern in the preparation of the cities of refuge. The roads leading to them were exceptionally wide by the standards of that time. While the width of a typical main road was sixteen cubits (about 26 feet), the roads to the cities of refuge were required to be twice as wide—thirty-two cubits (about 52 feet)!

The terrain was also specially prepared to assist the fugitive. Valleys were leveled, and hills were flattened to make the path easier to run. If a river ran across the road, a bridge was built over it to avoid delays.

At major crossroads, signposts were placed with the word "Miklat, Miklat" (Refuge, Refuge) to guide the person fleeing. Every year in the month of Adar, a full inspection of these roads was

conducted, to repair any damage and ensure they remained usable.

In addition to the six main cities of refuge, all 48 cities that belonged to the tribe of Levi also served as places of protection for someone who killed unintentionally.

The Procedure: Who Flees to the Cities of Refuge?

The primary purpose of the cities of refuge was to protect someone who killed accidentally. However, in practice, anyone who committed a killing—whether accidental or premeditated—would flee there.

Once the killer arrived at the city of refuge, the court would send officers to bring him to trial. These officers also protected him on the way from potential blood avengers.

If the court ruled that the killing was intentional, the judges would impose the appropriate punishment. If it was determined to be accidental, the officers would return the killer to the city of refuge, where he would remain in exile.

Why is the killer punished with exile?

Source 2 Sefer Hachinuch 410

Student's
pg. 2

The underlying rationale of the mitzvah: Murder is so serious a prohibition that it destroys the world, as Maimonides writes (Laws of Murder 4:9) that one who intentionally takes a life, even if they observed all other mitzvot, will not be spared from judgment, as Proverbs (28:17) says: “A man who is guilty of robbing one's lifeblood will flee to the pit, but no one will support him.” Therefore, even one who kills accidentally should be exiled, due to something so severe occurring through their actions. Exile is appropriate, because the pain of exile is likened to death, where a person leaves their native land, their friends and family, and lives with strangers the rest of their life.

Another benefit this serves is being spared from the hands of the avenger, and an additional benefit is the victim's family being spared from constantly seeing the killer before their eyes. All the Torah's ways are pleasant.

מְשָׁרְשֵׁי הַמִּצְוָה, לְפִי שְׁעוֹן הַרְצִיחָה
חֲמוּר עַד מְאֹד, שְׂכָה הַשְׁחָתַת הָעוֹלָם,
עַד שְׁאֲמָרוּ זְכוּרָנָם לְבִרְכָה (רמב"ם
הלכות רוצח ושמירת הנפש ד, ט),
שֶׁהַהוֹרֵג נֶפֶשׁ בְּמִזִּיד, אֶפְלוּ עֲשָׂה כָּל
הַמִּצְוֹת אֵינּוּ נֶצֶל מִן הַדִּין, שְׁנֵאָמַר
(משלי כח, יז) אָדָם עֹשֶׂה בְּדָם נֶפֶשׁ
עַד בּוֹר יָנוּס אֶל תְּמֹכּוֹ בּוֹ. וְלֹכֵן רְאוּי
לְמִי שֶׁהִרְגָּ אֶפְלוּ שׁוֹגֵג, מִכִּיּוֹן שְׂכָתָה
תִּקְלָה גְדוּלָה כְּזוֹ עַל יְדוֹ, שְׁיִצְטָעַר
עָלֶיהָ צָעַר גְּלוּת, שְׁשִׁקוּל כְּמַעַט
כְּצָעַר מִיָּתֵהּ שֶׁנִּפְרַד הָאָדָם מֵאוֹהָבָיו
וּמֵאֲרָץ מוֹלָדָתוֹ, וְשׁוֹכֵן כָּל יְמֵיו עִם
זָרִים.

וְעוֹד יֵשׁ תִּקּוּן הָעוֹלָם בְּמִצְוָה, כְּמוֹ
שְׂכָאָר הַכְּתוּב, שְׁיִנְצַל עִם זֶה מִיַּד
גּוֹאֵל הַדָּם לְבַל יִהְרָגוּ עַל לֹא חָמָס
כְּכַפְיוֹ, שֶׁהָרִי שׁוֹגֵג הִיָּה. וְעוֹד תּוֹעֵלָת
בְּדָבָר, לְבַל יִרְאוּ קְרוֹבֵי הַמִּפְּקָה אֶת
הָרוֹצֵחַ לְעֵינֵיהֶם תָּמִיד בְּמִקּוֹם
שְׁנִעֲשֵׂתָה הַרְעָה, וְכָל דְּרָכֵי הַתּוֹרָה
נֵעִם.

B. How Long Does the Exile Last?

Source 3a Numbers 35:28

The person exiled to the city of refuge would remain there for an undefined period of time, and would only be released after the death of the High Priest.

If the exiled person died before the High Priest's death, he would be buried in the city of refuge. After the High Priest passed away, it would be permitted to transfer his grave to another city.

Student's
pg. 3 For he shall remain in his city of refuge until the High Priest dies, and only after the High Priest has died, may the killer return to the land which is his possession.

כִּי בְעִיר מְקֻלְטוֹ יֵשֵׁב עַד מוֹת
הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדֹל, וְאַחֲרֵי מוֹת הַכֹּהֵן
הַגָּדֹל יָשׁוּב הָרֹצֵחַ אֶל אֶרֶץ
אֲחֻזָּתוֹ.

Source 4 Talmud, Makkot 11a

Student's
pg. 3 The mothers of the High Priests would supply them with food and clothing, so that they would not pray for their sons to die.

לְפִיכָךְ אֵימֹתֵיהֶן שָׁל פְּהָנִים
מְסַפְּקוֹת לָהֶן מַחֲיָה וְכֶסֶת, כְּדֵי
שֶׁלֹּא יִתְפַּלְלוּ עַל בְּנֵיהֶם שְׂיָמוּתוּ.

Since the Torah linked the release of those exiled to the cities of refuge with the death of the High Priest, the Talmud relates that the mother of the High Priest would travel from city to city, visiting the cities of refuge to supply the exiles with food and clothing. She did this so they would not pray for her son's death as a way to gain their freedom.

Some explain that her goal was not only to prevent them from praying for his death, but to care for them so generously that they would actually pray for him to live a long life.

Source 3b

Why does the Torah connect the liberation of the killers with the death of the high priest? Rashi gives two explanations:

Rashi, Numbers 35:25

Student's
pg. 3 The High Priest brings the Divine Presence to rest upon the Jewish people and thereby prolongs their lives, while the murderer causes the

עַד מוֹת הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדֹל. שֶׁהוּא
כֹּא לְהַשְׁרוֹת שְׂכִינָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל
וּלְהַאֲרִיךְ יְמֵיהֶם, וְהָרוּצֵחַ כֹּא
לְסַלֵּק אֶת הַשְׂכִּינָה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל

Student's
pg. 3

Divine Presence to depart from the people, and shortens their lives. It is not fitting for the killer to remain in the presence of the High Priest (Sifri).

וּמִקְצָר אֶת יְמֵי הַחַיִּים, אֵינּוּ
כְּדָאֵי שְׂיֵהָא לְפָנֵי כֹהֵן גָּדוֹל
;(ספרי)

A person who has shortened the life of another is not worthy to walk free and be in the presence of the High Priest. The High Priest prolongs the lives of the people of Israel and brings the Divine Presence upon them through the sacred service in the Temple, while this person has done the exact opposite.

This can be compared to the halachah that forbids iron tools from being used on the stones of the altar. Iron shortens human life, while the altar was created to prolong life.

Mishnah, Middot 3:4

Student's
pg. 3

They would bring whole stones from there, upon which no iron had been lifted, for iron disqualifies by mere touch...

וּמִבֵּיָאִים מְשֻׁם אֲבָנִים
שְׁלֵמוֹת, שְׁלֵא הוּנְף עֲלֵיהֶן
בְּרִזָּל, שֶׁהַבְּרִזָּל פּוֹסֵל
בְּנִגְיָעָה...

Student's
pg. 4

For iron was created to shorten human life, and the altar was created to prolong human life. It is not proper, therefore, that that which shortens life should be lifted against that which prolongs it.

שֶׁהַבְּרִזָּל נִבְרָא לְקַצֵּר יָמָיו
שֶׁל אָדָם, וְהַמִּזְבֵּחַ נִבְרָא
לְהַאָרִיךְ יָמָיו שֶׁל אָדָם,
אֵינּוּ בְדִין שְׂיוּנָף הַמְקַצֵּר
עַל הַמַּאָרִיךְ.

Rashi continues and adds a second explanation:

Rashi, Numbers 35:25

Student's
pg. 4

Another explanation: Because the High Priest should have prayed that such a tragedy not occur to Israel during his lifetime (see Makkot 11).

דְּבַר אַחַר – לְפִי שְׁהֵיָה לּוֹ
לְכֹהֵן גָּדוֹל לְהַתְּפִיל שְׁלֵא
תֵאָרַע תִּקְלָה זֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל
בְּחַיָּו (עֵינֵן מִכּוֹת י"א):

>> The Rebbe

Punishing the High Priest?

Student's
pg. 4

The commentators write that, according to Rashi's second explanation—"Because he [the High Priest] should have prayed"—the verse "he shall remain there until the death of the High Priest" means that the High Priest is being

כתבו המפרשים¹, שלפירוש השני ברש"י - "לפי שהיה לו להתפלל כו" - כוונת הכתוב "וישב בה עד מות הכהן הגדול" היא, ש"הכהן הגדול נענש... על שלא התפלל"².

1. שפ"ח כאן. מפרשים שנשמנו בהערה 12 ועוד.
2. ל' השפ"ח.

Student's punished for failing to pray.
pg. 4

But this seems puzzling: where in the verses or in the law of “he shall remain there until the death of the High Priest” is there any hint that this is a punishment for the High Priest? And in what way is it a punishment for him that the accidental killer must stay in a city of refuge until the High Priest dies?

Some commentators explain that, since the High Priest did not pray as he should have, the Torah required that the killer remain in the city of refuge until the High Priest's death, and experience the hardship of not being able to return home as long as the High Priest is alive. As a result, the killer will pray for the High Priest's death, his prayer will be accepted, and the High Priest will receive his punishment. A new High Priest will then be appointed, and this kind of tragedy will no longer occur in Israel.

Student's
pg. 5

However, this seems like a very forced reading of Rashi's words. Rashi doesn't mention—or even allude—that the killer will pray for the High Priest's death. If that's what Rashi meant he should have said so explicitly—especially considering that his commentary is written with a beginner student in mind.

The very idea itself—that the Torah's reason for requiring the killer to stay in exile until the High Priest dies is so that people will pray for the High Priest to die—is also highly questionable. In the words of the Gur Aryeh, “These are not the ways of the true Torah.”

ולכאורה יש לתמוה: היכן מרומז בכתוב ובדין של “וישב בה עד מות הכהן הגדול” שיש כאן עונש על הכהן הגדול? ומהו העונש לכהן הגדול³ בזה שהרוצח צריך לישוב בעיר מקלטו עד מות הכהן הגדול?!⁴

יש מפרשים⁵, ש”לפי שלא התפלל הכהן גדול כו', לכך חייבה אותו התורה לזה שישוב בעיר מקלטו עד מות הכהן הגדול, ויצטער שלא יוכל לשוב לשבת לביתו כל זמן שהכהן גדול חי, ומתוך כך יתפלל הוא על מיתת הכהן גדול, ותתקבל תפלתו ויקבל הכהן הגדול את עונשו... ויתמנה אחר... ולא תהיה עוד תקלה בישראל”.

ולכאורה דוחק גדול לפרש כן בלשון רש”י, שלא הזכיר כלל (אפילו לא ברמז) שהרוצח יתפלל על מיתת הכהן גדול. ואם זוהי כוונת רש”י - הוזה ליה לפרשה.

וגם תוכן הפירוש - שהטעם שאמרה תורה “עד מות הכהן הגדול” הוא כדי שהרוצחים יתפללו למיתתו של כהן גדול - תמוה מאד, ובלשון הגור אריה “אין אלו דרכי התורה האמיתית”.

4. ראה גם משכיל לדוד כאן.
5. לבוש על פירש”י כאן. וראה גם גו”א, ח”י ופי” מהרי”ק (על פרש”י), מלאכת הקודש. ועוד.

3. בפשטות י”ל שעצם הענין שמקשרים עונש הרוצח (ענין אינו רצוי כלל) עם (מצב) הכהן הגדול הי”ז עונש עבורו (ע”ד רש”י בשלה טו, כח). אבל אי”ז טעם על ישיבת הרוצח בעיר מקלט עד מות הכה”ג (שליכן פי” המפרשים, שכוונת הכתוב שהכה”ג מת על שלא התפלל כו', בבבנים).

C. Why Is Exile Until the Death of the High Priest?

>> The Rebbe

Short-lived anger

Student's
pg. 6

The reason Rashi brings explanations here for why the accidental killer must remain in the city of refuge “until the death of the High Priest” is not simply to explain the rationale of this law. Rather, it's to resolve a textual difficulty in the verses.

The rule that “he shall remain there until the death of the High Priest” appears right after the verse says, “The congregation shall rescue the killer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and return him to his city of refuge.” This raises an obvious question: what is the connection between protecting the killer from the avenger and the death of the High Priest? If the purpose of the city of refuge is to provide safety from the avenger, then what does the death of the High Priest have to do with that protection? Why should the need for refuge come to an end because of his death?

There's another problem as well:

On the simple level, it would seem that the danger of revenge—“lest [the avenger] pursue... while his heart is hot”—is something that fades over a relatively short time. This is evident in the story of Jacob and Esau: even though Esau held a grudge and wanted to kill Jacob (over something that had happened to him personally), Rebecca told Jacob,

זה שרש"י הביא כאן את הטעמים על ישיבת הרוצח בעיר מקלטו "עד מות הכהן הגדול", אינו סתם לדרוש את טעם הכתוב, אלא לתרץ קושיא בכתובים כאן⁶:

הדין של "וישב בה עד מות הכהן הגדול", בא בהמשך למה שנאמר לפני זה "והצילו העדה את הרוצח מיד גואל הדם והשיבו אותו גו' אל עיר מקלטו". ותמוה, לכאורה: מהי השייכות בין ההצלה מיד גואל הדם ל"מות הכהן הגדול" - אם עיר מקלט היא מפני שהרוצח מוכרח להגנה מגואל הדם, מה ישתנה בזה ועד לביטול ההכרח - על ידי מיתת הכהן גדול?⁷

ועוד זאת:

על דרך הפשט, החשש מנקמה - "פן ירדוף... יחם לבבו"⁸ - נמשך זמן לא ארוך, וכמובן מסיפור יעקב ועשו⁹, שאף ש"וישטום עשו את יעקב" ורצה להרוג את יעקב (מפני דבר שנעשה לו בעצמו) - מכל מקום אמרה רבקה ליעקב "ברח לך אל לבן גו' וישבת

7. ובמז"נ (ח"ג פ"ז) שעי"ז תנוח דעת גואל הדם. ע"ש. וכ"ה ברלב"ג ואברבנאל כאן ועוד.
8. פ' שופטים יט, ו.
9. תולדות מ, מא-מה.

6. גם י"ל, כי בנדו"ד - העונש לישיב בעיר מקלט עד מות הכה"ג - ה"ז דין תמוה, שאין העונש (זמן הישיבה בעיר מקלט) שווה מדור לדור, וכן בדור (כה"ג) אחד עצמו - בין רוצח לרוצח (וראה ספורנו, באר התורה (בס' הואיל משה לבעמח"ס מטה משה) ועוד פרשתנו כאן), ולכן מוכרח רש"י לפרש שזה שייך לכהן גדול.

Student's
pg. 7

“Flee to Laban... and stay there a few days until your brother’s anger subsides.”

עמו ימים אחדים (מועטים¹⁰) עד אשר תשוב חמת אחיך.”

Source 5 Genesis 27:41-45

Student's
pg. 7

Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing their father had given him. Esau said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.” Rebecca heard what Esau, her older son, had said. She sent for Jacob, her younger son, and said to him, “Behold, your brother Esau intends to harm you and wishes to kill you.

וַיִּשְׂטֵם עֵשָׂו אֶת יַעֲקֹב עַל הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בָּרַכּוּ אָבִיו, וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו בְּלִבּוֹ, 'יִקְרְבוּ יָמֵי אָבִל אָבִי וְאֶהְרֹגָה אֶת יַעֲקֹב אָחִי'. וַיִּגַד לְרַבֵּקָה אֶת דְּבָרֵי עֵשָׂו בְּנֵה הַגָּדֹל, וַתִּשְׁלַח וַתִּקְרָא לְיַעֲקֹב בְּנֵה הַקָּטָן, וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו, "הִנֵּה עֹשֶׂה אָחִיךָ מִתְנַחֵם לְךָ לְהַרְגֶךָ.

Now, my son, listen to me: arise and flee to my brother Laban in Haran. Stay with him for a while until your brother’s anger has passed, until his rage against you subsides and he forgets what you did to him. Then I will send for you and bring you back. Why should I lose both of you in one day?”

וַעֲתָה בְנֵי שְׁמַע בְּקֹלִי, וְקוּם בָּרַח לְךָ אֶל לָבָן אָחִי חָרָנָה. וַיִּשְׁבַּתָּ עִמּוֹ יָמִים אֶחָדִים, עַד אֲשֶׁר תִּשׁוּב חֲמַת אָחִיךָ. עַד שׁוֹב אַף אָחִיךָ מִמֶּךָ, וַיִּשְ�כַּח אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ לוֹ, וַיִּשְׁלַחְתִּי וְלִקְחֹתִיךָ מִשָּׁם, לָמָּה אֲשַׁכַּל גַּם שְׁנֵיכֶם יוֹם אֶחָד?"

>> The Rebbe

Student's
pg. 7

This is all the more true in our case. The killer acted unintentionally (“he was not his enemy, nor was he seeking his harm”), and the avenger is merely a relative of the victim. This is all the more reason to expect that after just a short time, his anger would subside, and his heart would no longer burn with a desire to take revenge on someone who accidentally caused his relative’s death.

ועל אחת כמה וכמה בנידון דידן, הורג נפש בשגגה (ש"לא אויב לו ולא מבקש רעתו"¹¹), וגואל הדם הוא רק קרוב של הנרצח - שלאחרי ימים אחדים בודאי תשוב חמתו ולא יחם לבבו נגד ההורג נפש קרובו ובשגגה¹².

If so, the question becomes stronger: since the purpose of the killer’s stay in the city of refuge

ואם כן תמוה: מכיון ששייבת הרוצח בעיר מקלטו היא להציל אותו מנקמת גואל הדם (וכמובן גם מתחילת הפרשה¹³ "והיו לכם הערים

11. פרשתנו לה, כג. וראה גם פ' שופטים שם, ד. שם, ו.
12. וראה רמב"ן פרשתנו לה, לא.
13. פרשתנו לה, יב.

10. מפרש רש"י שם, מד. ברש"י ויצא (כט, יח), ד"שבע שנים הם ימים אחדים שאמרה לו אמו". ויתירה מזו - עשו רצה להורגו גם כשחזר יעקב מבית לבן (ר"פ וישלח). אבל שם המדובר בעשו ששונא בלאה"כ את יעקב (וראה רש"י וישלח לג, ט) משא"כ בנדוד"ד.

Student's
pg. 8

is to protect him from the avenger's revenge (as is clear from the beginning of the section: "These cities shall be a refuge from the avenger, so that the killer not die"), then why must the killer remain in the city for such a long time—"until the death of the High Priest"?

For the killer's sake

Student's
pg. 8

To resolve this difficulty, Rashi brings two explanations. Both explain that the requirement for the killer to stay in the city of refuge (for such an extended period) is not primarily due to the danger posed by the avenger, but rather because of the killer's own actions.

According to the first explanation: "He is not worthy to be in the presence of the High Priest."

According to the second: only with the death of the High Priest is his guilt atoned for.

The Rebbe explains that the main reason an accidental killer is required to dwell in the protected city of refuge is because of the judgment hanging over him. One might mistakenly think that the stay in the city of refuge is solely for protection from the avenger's wrath, who seeks blood revenge, and therefore a relatively short stay would suffice. However, the extended time spent there—until the death of the High Priest—proves that there is something beyond protection from the family's response; it is a form of punishment and atonement for the great sin caused by the killer's actions, even if the act was accidental.

Now we can explore why the duration of the punishment coincides with the lifetime of the High Priest, who served during the time of the killer's negligent act.

למקלט מגואל ולא ימות הרוצח"
- מדוע מאריכים את ישיבת הרוצח
בעיר מקלט זמן רב כל כך "עד מות
הכהן הגדול"?

ולתרץ שאלה זו מביא רש"י שני
פירושים המסבירים שחובת ישיבתו
(המוארכת) של הרוצח בעיר מקלט
אינה (בעיקרה) מפני חשש נקמה
מצד גואל הדם, אלא זהו (גם ועיקר)
ענין בפני עצמו, המוטל על הרוצח
בגלל מעשה הרציחה שלו -

לפירוש הראשון מפני ש"אינו כדאי
שיהא לפני כהן גדול",

ולפירוש השני מפני שרק אז -
במיתת הכהן גדול - מתכפר עונו.¹⁴

14. בשיחה, ממשיך הרבי להבהיר שאלה שיכולה לצוץ:
זה שנאמר כאן (בתחילת הכתוב) "והצילו גו' הרוצח מיד גואל הדם", אין הכוונה
שהחשש הוא (רק) פן יחם לבבו של גואל הדם ויהרוג אותו מצד נקמה - אלא
שה"הצלה" היא מהריגה שמצד הדין, "אין לו דם" (פרשתנו לה, מ). כלומר: מכיון
שאם הרוצח יוצא מעיר מקלט ומצא אותו גואל הדם אמרה תורה (כהמשך
הכתובים כאן) פרשתנו לה, מ) "ורצח גואל הדם את הרוצח אין לו דם" - נמצא,

Student's This can be explained further:
pg. 8

ויש לומר ההסברה בזה:

Earlier, in the portion of Chukat, Rashi commented that “the death of the righteous brings atonement.”

לעיל בפרשת חוקת¹⁵ כתב רש"י
ש"מיתת צדיקים מכפרת."

Source 6 Numbers 20:1

Student's The entire congregation of the children
pg. 8 of Israel arrived at the desert of Tzin in the first month, and the people settled in Kadesh. Miriam died there and was buried there.

וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל הָעֵדָה
מִדְבַּר צִן בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן וַיָּשֻׁבוּ
הָעָם בְּקֶדְשׁ, וַתָּמָת שָׁם מִרְיָם
וַתִּקָּבֵר שָׁם.

Rashi

Student's **Miriam died there:** Why is Miriam's
pg. 9 death written adjacent to the Red Heifer? To teach us that the death of the righteous atones like the offering of sacrifices.

וַתָּמָת שָׁם מִרְיָם. לָמָּה
נִסְמְכָה פְּרִשְׁת מִיתַת מִרְיָם
לְפָרֶשֶׁת פָּרָה אֲדָמָה? לֹאמַר
לָּהּ, מָה קְרִיבָנוֹת מְכַפְּרִין,
אִף מִיתַת צְדִיקִים מְכַפְּרֶת
(מועד קטן כ"ח):

>> The Rebbe

Student's From this, we also understand why in our case,
pg. 9 the death of the High Priest brings atonement for the killer's sin. However, Rashi is troubled by a question: what is the specific connection between this particular wrongdoing—accidentally killing someone—and the death of the High Priest in particular (and not the death of some other righteous person)?

ומזה מובן גם בנדון דידן, שמיתת כהן גדול מועילה לכפר על עון הרוצח¹⁶. אלא שקשה ליה לרש"י - מהי השייכות המיוחדת בין חטא זה של הורג נפש בשגגה למיתת כהן גדול דוקא (ולא צדיק אחר¹⁷)?

To answer this, Rashi explains: “Because the High Priest should have prayed that such a mishap would not occur.” In other words, preventing such tragedies is specifically the responsibility of the

ולכן פירש רש"י "לפי שהיה לו לכהן גדול להתפלל שלא תארע תקלה זו כו", והיינו שמניעת תקלה זו שייכת לתפילת כהן גדול דוקא, ומכיון שיש בכהן

15. וכקושיית הבאר מים חיים. בפשטות י"ל כי מציינו אצל הכה"ג שמכפר על כל ישראל (נסמן בהערה 3. וראה ראב"ע ועוד כאן). אבל עדיין צריך ביאור, מדוע מקשרים זה עם מיתת הכה"ג (ואינו פועל כפרת הרוצח בחייו ע"י עבודתו)? ולכן מסתבר לומר שקשור עם ענין של חסרון מצד הכה"ג.

15. כ. א.
16. ראה גם באר מים חיים (לאחוי המהר"ל) כאן בשם הרלב"ג (וברלב"ג עה"ת פרשתנו שלפנינו ליתא). ש"ך עה"ת כאן. ובגמ' מכות (יא, ב) מיתת כהן הוא דמכפרא. וראה חדא"ג מהר"ל שם.

Student's
pg. 9

High Priest—through his prayers. Since the High Priest contributed indirectly to the occurrence of this tragedy, his death brings atonement. It atones for his failing and for the killer's mistake.

גדול גרם לתקלה זו (שלא התפלל כו'), לכן פועלת מיתתו להשלים זה ולכפר תקלה זו, עונו של הרוצח¹⁸.

The Rebbe offers a novel insight: since it is well known that the death of a righteous person atones for certain sins committed during his generation, so too, in our case, the death of the High Priest serves as atonement for the actions of the accidental killer.

The question arises: why does the death of the High Priest alone bring atonement, and not the death of any other righteous person? On this, Rashi explains that this particular sin could have been prevented by the High Priest if he had prayed that such a tragedy would not occur. Since this unfortunate event did happen, a certain responsibility attaches to the High Priest.

Therefore, it is specifically with the death of the High Priest that the sin is completely atoned for, and the atonement is finalized. Consequently, the period of the accidental killer's punishment comes to an end.

Source 7 Torat Menachem 5721:2, p. 182

In another talk, the Rebbe further explains the "guilt" of the High Priest for the fact that such a tragic accident could occur during his tenure.

Student's
pg. 9

This is similar to what the Sages say: "A Sanhedrin that executes even once in seven years is called 'destructive.'"

וזהו ש"סנהדרין ההורגת אחד בשבוע (פעם אחת בשבע שנים) נקראת חובלנית" – ולכאורה אינו מובן: כיון שמדובר אודות סנהדרין כשרה, אם כן, מדוע מגיע להם שיקראו "חובלנית", בה בשעה שלא עשו אלא על פי ציווי התורה?

Student's
pg. 10

At first glance, this seems difficult to understand: if the Sanhedrin is acting in accordance with Torah law, why would they be labeled as destructive?

The answer is that the very fact that such a case could occur in their time indicates that on some subtle level, something was lacking in them. This is why the term "destructive" is applied to them.

אך הענין הוא, שכיון שבהיותם סנהדרין היה יכול לקרות בימיהם שאחד מישראל יעבור על חטא שענשו משפט מות, הרי זו הוכחה שבדקות דדקות יש אצלם ענין זה, ולכן נקראים "חובלנית".

Similarly, the commentators explain that one who kills unintentionally must flee to a city of refuge and remain there "until the death of the High Priest... and after the High Priest's death, the killer may return to his land."

ועל דרך המבואר במפרשים בנוגע למכה נפש בשגגה שצריך

18. וכן משמע בבחי' כאן, דמרז"ל (מכות שם, א) ש"הי' לו לבקש רחמים על בני דורו כו'" הוא טעם על שמיתת כה"ג מכפרת על הרוצח. ואולי זוהי גם כוונת הרמב"ע כאן.

Student's
pg. 10

This connection between the accidental killing and the High Priest's death seems puzzling: what does the death of the High Priest in Jerusalem have to do with releasing someone from exile?

The deeper meaning is this: the priests, led by the High Priest, are meant to be the moral and spiritual teachers of the nation—"They shall teach Your laws to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel."

If, despite their presence and influence, such a tragedy occurred—even unintentionally—it indicates that the High Priest has some issue that requires atonement. His death brings atonement, and serves to repair this subtle flaw. And once that is rectified, the atonement extends also to the killer, whose sin was linked to that deficiency. As the verse says, "Your sin has been removed, your transgression atoned." Therefore, the killer may now return to his home.

Here the Rebbe further explains the idea that the death of the High Priest brings atonement for his own subtle share of responsibility in the tragic event. Once that is atoned for, the killer's sin is automatically atoned as well. That is why the killer is then permitted to return home.

All intertwined

Student's
pg. 10

From this we can learn a powerful message about love and unity among the Jewish people.

Student's
pg. 11

The High Priest represents the highest spiritual level within the Jewish nation. Someone who kills accidentally represents the lowest level. (Someone who kills intentionally is sentenced to death and is no longer among the living, while among those who remain alive, there is no lower status than that of an accidental killer. This is why he is the only sinner punished with exile.)

לנוס לעיר מקלט ולישב בה "עד מות הכהן הגדול . . . ואחרי מות הכהן הגדול ישוב הרוצח אל ארץ אחוזתו". ולכאורה אינו מובן: מהו קישור העניינים? וכי משום שהכהן גדול מת במקומו בירושלים, נפטר הרוצח מהכפרה שעל ידי הגלות לעיר מקלט?!

אך העניין הוא, שענינם של הכהנים בראשותו של הכהן גדול הוא כמו שכתוב "יורו משפטיך ליעקב ותורתך לישראל", וכיון שלמרות זאת היה ענין של מכה נפש אפילו בשגגה, הרי זו הוכחה שאצל הכהן גדול יש ענין הדורש כפרה, ולכן, ב"מות הכהן הגדול", שמיתה מכפרת, היינו, שנתכפרה אצלו הנקודה שהיתה קשורה עם מכה נפש בשגגה, אזי נתכפר גם לרוצח, "וסר עונך וחטאתך תכופר", ולכן יכול לשוב לאחוזתו.

ומכל זה יש ללמוד הוראה נפלאה בענין אהבת ואחדות ישראל:

כהן גדול הוא הדרגא הנעלית ביותר שבעם ישראל, ומכה נפש בשגגה הוא הדרגא הפחותה ביותר [דמכה נפש במזיד הרי עונשו מיתה ואיש מת הוא, אבל בין הנשארים בחיים אין למטה מהורג נפש בשגגה, שלכן רק בו מצינו עונש גלות¹⁹].

19. ששקול כמעט כצער מיתה (חינוך מצוה ת').

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And yet, the Torah teaches that these two extremes within the nation are connected to one another. The atonement of the accidental killer is tied to the High Priest. This is because the role of the High Priest is to be a lover of the Jewish people. As we find with Aaron, the High Priest, who is described as “loving the creations”—meaning he loved even those people whose only redeeming quality is their being created by G-d.

ומלמדנו הכתוב - שגם הם (שני הקצוות שבבני ישראל) תלויים זה בזה, עד שתלתה התורה כפרת מכה נפש זה עם הכהן גדול, כי זהו ענינו של הכהן גדול - אוהב ישראל, כמו שמצינו באהרן כהן גדול שהיה "אוהב" (אפילו) את הבריות".

חלקים משיחת שבת פרשת מטות - מסעי, ה'תשל"ד
לקוטי שיחות חלק ל"ג, עמוד 206
בעיבוד קל

Key Points:

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• A person who accidentally kills another flees to a city of refuge, thereby gaining protection from the blood avenger who might seek to kill him in revenge. The duration of the stay in the city of refuge lasts until the death of the High Priest.

The Rebbe asks:

- 1. Seemingly, the purpose of the cities of refuge is to protect from the blood avenger. What changes when the High Priest dies?
- 2. Naturally, the anger of the blood avenger subsides over time. Why then is the punishment of exile set to last potentially many years, until the death of the High Priest?

Explanation:

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- The answer lies in Rashi's words, explaining that the killer's residence in the city of refuge is not only a means of protection from the avenger, but also serves as a form of punishment and atonement for the accidental killer.
- However, the punishment ends with the death of the High Priest, because "the death of righteous people atones." Since the High Priest bears partial responsibility for the murder, it is specifically his death that atones for that sin.

Takeaway:

The High Priest, the most exalted person, and the accidental killer, considered the lowest, are still interdependent. This teaches us the importance of unity and mutual responsibility between all members of the Jewish people.