

Six Steps to Finding Your Inner Refuge

Numbers, Ch. 35

11. You shall designate cities for yourselves; they shall be cities of refuge for you, and a murderer who killed a person unintentionally shall flee there.

12. These cities shall serve you as a refuge from an avenger, so that the murderer shall not die until he stands in judgment before the congregation.

13. The cities that you provide shall serve as six cities of refuge for you.

15. These six cities shall be a refuge for the children of Israel and for the proselyte and resident among them, so that anyone who unintentionally kills a person can flee there.

25. The congregation shall protect the murderer from the hand of the blood avenger, and the congregation shall return him to the city of refuge to which he had fled, and he shall remain there until the Kohen Gadol, who anointed him with the sacred oil, dies.

And you shall appoint for you cities, to be cities of refuge for you (35:11)

Mishneh Torah

The court is obligated to straighten the roads to the cities of refuge, to repair them and broaden them. They must remove all impediments and obstacles... bridges should be built [over all natural barriers] so as not to delay one who is fleeing to [the city of refuge]. The width of a road to a city of refuge should not be less than thirty-two cubits. "Refuge", "Refuge", was written at all crossroads so that the murderers should recognize the way and turn there.

Six cities of refuge shall they be for you (35:13)

Sefer HaChinuch

The Torah includes six hundred and thirteen mitzvot (commandments)... Of these, the mitzvot that can be observed today [following the destruction of the Holy Temple and our exile from the Holy Land] number, altogether, three hundred and thirty-nine. Among these are mitzvot for which a person becomes obligated only under certain circumstances, so that it is possible that never in his lifetime will these circumstances come about and he will never have the opportunity to do them--e.g., the mitzvah to pay an employee on time... The number of mitzvot that every Jew is obligated in is two hundred and seventy... Many of these, however, are binding only on certain days of the year or certain times of the day.

There are six mitzvot whose obligation is constant, and does not depart from the person for a single moment throughout his lifetime. They are symbolized by the verse, "Six cities of refuge shall they be for you." These are:

- 1) To believe in G-d, and that He created all that exists.
- 2) Not to believe in any power other than the One Creator.
- 3) To believe in His absolute Oneness.
- 4) To be in awe of Him.
- 5) To love Him.
- 6) Not to pursue the passions of the heart or stray after the temptations presented by the eyes.



פרק כב

יא. והקרייתם לְכֶם עָרִים עָרֵי מִקְלָט

תִּהְיֶינָה לְכֶם וְנָס שָׂמָּה רֹצֵחַ מִכַּה נֶפֶשׁ בְּשֹׁגְגָה: יב. וְהָיוּ לְכֶם הָעָרִים לְמִקְלָט מִגֹּאֵל וְלֹא יָמוּת הָרֹצֵחַ עַד עֲמֹדוֹ לִפְנֵי הָעֵדָה לְמִשְׁפָּט: יג. וְהָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּתְּנוּ יֵשׁ עָרֵי מִקְלָט תִּהְיֶינָה לְכֶם: טו. לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלִגֵּר וְלְתוֹשָׁב בְּתוֹכָם תִּהְיֶינָה יֵשׁ הָעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְמִקְלָט לְנוֹס שָׂמָּה כָּל מִכַּה נֶפֶשׁ בְּשֹׁגְגָה: כה. וְהִצִּילוּ הָעֵדָה אֶת הָרֹצֵחַ מִיַּד גֹּאֵל הַדָּם וְהָשִׁיבוּ אֹתוֹ הָעֵדָה אֶל עִיר מִקְלָטוֹ אֲשֶׁר נָס שָׂמָּה וַיֵּשֶׁב בָּהּ עַד מוֹת הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדֹל אֲשֶׁר מָשַׁח אֹתוֹ בְּשֶׁמֶן הַקֹּדֶשׁ:

To flee there anyone who slays a soul unawares (35:15)

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

Every transgression of the Divine will is a subtle form of "inadvertent murder": "Murder" because it disrupts the flow of vitality from the Source of Life to the soul of the transgressor; "inadvertent" because a sinful deed is always contrary to the true will of the transgressor, who has been misled by the distortions imposed by his animal self. For the one who spiritually "slays a soul unawares" there have been set aside six spiritual "cities of refuge." These are the "six constant mitzvot" that apply to every Jew, at all times, and in all circumstances, so that they are readily accessible to one who seeks refuge from his faults and failings. But a haven is of little use if it is inaccessible or its location is unknown. As is the case with the physical cities of refuge, it is the community's responsibility to "straighten the roads... remove all impediments and obstacles" and post signs at all crossroads and pointing the way to the haven of Torah.

And he shall remain there until the death of the High Priest (35:25)

Talmud, Makot 11a

Therefore, mothers of high priests were wont to provide food and raiment for them, that they should not pray for their son's death.

Why is the High Priest to blame? --As they say here [in Babylon], "Toby did the jobbing and Ziggad got the slogging?" or as they say there [in the Land of Israel]: "Shechem got him a wife and Mabgai caught the knife?" Said a venerable old scholar: I heard an explanation at one of the sessional lectures of Raba, that they should have implored Divine grace for their generation, which they failed to do.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

The inadvertent killer's hands are stained with the blood of another human being. The only one lower than him on the ladder of morality is the deliberate murderer, but he is considered dead since he is liable to the death penalty. In contrast, the high priest is the most exalted in the nation. Yet the Torah links the inadvertent killer to the high priest and the high priest must pray that no one else becomes an inadvertent killer. No matter what heights we have reached on the ladder of spiritual or social status, we must remain concerned with all elements of society, even the lowest. And even if we think we exist on the lower echelons of humanity, we must remember, we are still connected with those on the highest echelons, for we are all one people.

SUMMARY

- When someone takes a life, if the act was 1) accidental and blameless, perpetrator is absolved of responsibility; 2) unintentional but careless, the perpetrator is exiled to a city of refuge 3) intentional and with forwarning, the perpetrator is liable to execution by court. Pending the court's decision of which of the above is applicable, a close relative has the right to kill the perpetrator unless he escapes to a city of refuge.
- Spiritually every sin is an "inadvertent murder". The six spiritual cities of refuge are the six constant mitzvot.
- We are all responsible to post "signs" and teach the ways of the Torah.
- The high priest is connected to the murderer and should have prayed for him. The murderer, no matter how low he has fallen, is still connected to the high priest.

