

**"And if a man will come presumptuously upon his fellow to slay him with guile, from My altar, take him for execution."
(21:14)**

Rashi explains that if this murderer were a *Kohen* who had intended to perform the service in the *Bais Hamikdash*, he may be taken away to his execution. The altar does not serve as a place of refuge for those who deserve punishment. *Horav Moshe Shternbuch Shlita* offers a unique homiletic approach to understanding this *pasuk*. One should not think that by performing *mitzvos* he can commute the punishment he merits for the various sins he has committed. Just as a sin does not have the power to extinguish a *mitzvah*, likewise, a *mitzvah* cannot erase a sin. The only way that one can effect penance for his transgressions is through repentance and contrition. This is the message of this *pasuk*: "From my altar, take him for execution," the *mitzvah* of performing the service in the *Bais Hamikdash* does not atone for the sin of murder. A *Kohen* who transgresses must receive his due punishment despite his exalted station in life. This is a powerful message for he who foolishly thinks that he can follow the urging of his evil inclination, as long as he balances these misdeeds with *mitzvos*. Indeed, he will be rewarded for his *mitzvos*, but he will still be held responsible for his *aveiros*.