

Cities of refuge they shall be for you. And there shall run the murderer who kills any person through error... And he shall dwell there until the death of the Kohen Gadol." (35:11-25)

It is well known that one who accidentally murders is exiled to the cities of refuge to reside there until the demise of the current *Kohen Gadol*. What is the halacha, however, in the event that the *Kohen Gadol* dies immediately following the announced verdict? Is the murderer to be exiled or is he free to return home? The *halacha* in this case is clear: He may go home, and it is considered as though he had fulfilled his commitment in the city of refuge.

There is yet another situation that must be *halachically* clarified. If the *Kohen Gadol* dies and a new *Kohen Gadol* is anointed before the formal pronouncement of the verdict, the murderer must wait until the second *Kohen Gadol's* death before he is free to return home. The *Talmud* in *Makos (11a)* questions this *halacha*. Why should the new *Kohen Gadol* have jurisdiction over an event which occurred prior to his short tenure? The *Talmud* responds that even in the short interval between his appointment and the announcement of the verdict, he should have prayed to Hashem that the murderer be acquitted. This is astonishing! Is it not too demanding to expect the newly appointed *Kohen Gadol* to drop everything and pray for the welfare of the murderer during this short time of intense emotional joy?

We may derive from this that a spiritual leader has perpetual responsibility to his congregation. His own personal life is secondary to the needs of the nation. His election to higher spiritual office demands exceptional commitment and sensitivity. This subtle criticism of the *Kohen Gadol* applies to all who serve in capacities of *Torah* leadership, in education, in the Rabbinate or in community service. Even when personal commitments demand special attention, the personal needs of the individual members of one's constituency take precedence.