

He shall dwell in it until the death of the Kohen Gadol, whom he had anointed with the sacred oil. (35:25)

What did the *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest, do to deserve such a “relationship” with the unintentional murderer? It is almost as if the *Kohen Gadol* shares punitively with the *rotzeiach b’shogeig*. *Rashi* explains that the *Kohen Gadol* serves as the nation’s spiritual leader. As such, he has a responsibility to pray for his people – pray that no one sustains a fatal accident at the hands of another Jew. Apparently, he either did not pray, or he did not pray with sufficient intensity. In any event, a man was killed unintentionally. The *Kohen Gadol* must assume some of this responsibility.

Sforno offers his own insight, which addresses the varying degrees of unintentional occurrences. There are some cases which are very close to accidental, and other cases which smack of negligence. How is *bais din* to determine the length of time the unintentional murderer should spend in exile? Clearly, this can only be determined by Divine insight. Thus, the decision is left up to Hashem, Who links the *rotzeiach*’s period of incarceration in the City of Refuge with the *Kohen Gadol*’s lifespan.

The *Talmud Makkos* 11b questions the wording of the *pasuk*, “He shall dwell in it until the death of the *Kohen Gadol*, whom he had anointed with the sacred oil.” What does the *pasuk* mean when it says, “whom **he** had anointed with the sacred oil”? Is the killer the one who anoints the *Kohen Gadol*? Rather, *Chazal* explains that these words refer to the one who was anointed in his days – meaning, **after** he became a killer. Despite the fact that the *Kohen Gadol*’s entry onto the scene came **after** the unintentional murder, the *Kohen Gadol*’s passing still frees the killer from exile.

A simple question – a simple answer. So, why could the Torah not have just written, “Until the death of the *Kohen Gadol* who was anointed with the sacred oil”? Why is it necessary to write the text in such a manner that it alludes to the killer playing a role in anointing the *Kohen Gadol*? It seems like an elaborate method which could have been circumvented by a simple rendering of the text.

In his *Meshech Chochmah*, *Horav Meir Simchah HaKohen, zl, m’Dvinsk*, writes that the Torah means to teach us a powerful lesson. True, the killer did not perform the actual anointing, but he plays a hidden role in determining who shall be the next *Kohen Gadol*. Hashem runs the world with a vision that is imperceptible to human cognition, because we are clueless to the manifold factors that enter into every equation. Indeed, there are times when the *Kohen Gadol*, who is “selected” for this illustrious position, is determined by his pre-designated (from birth) lifespan in connection with the level of unintentionality of the murderer. In other words, “Reuven” kills “Shimon” unintentionally in such a manner that would warrant him to remain in the city of refuge for ten years as atonement for his sin. Hashem now has to match Reuven with a *Kohen Gadol* who has only ten years to live. If Reuven’s punishment should last ten years and no more, the next *Kohen Gadol* cannot really be an individual who has a long and healthy lifespan. Thus, essentially, a killer

is anointing the *Kohen Gadol*!

We go through life wondering why things happen the way they do – when they do, and by and to whom. Some question events, which to the human eye simply do not make sense. Why should “Reuven” ascend to a position of leadership when, in fact, “Shimon” is more worthy? Why is “Levi” blessed with such incredibly good fortune, while many others who seem so much more deserving go from one misery to another? We do not know why, because we are unaware of all of the factors. One thing is certain: Hashem knows what He is doing. His decisions are sound and true. We just do not understand them because we know so very little.

Two *Kohanim* grow up together – go to the same *yeshivah* – are both erudite and saintly. Yet, one becomes *Kohen Gadol*. Why? Only Hashem knows, but a possibility exists that it has nothing to do with the individual *Kohen*. It is because he is a “perfect” match for the killer.