



MISHPATIM

This week, we will read Parshat Mishpatim, which contains many, many mitzvot. As some people like to say, last week we got the original Ten Commandments, now we're going to get the details. Going through all the mitzvot in the Parsha would make us a REALLY LONG Parsha Page. So, we'll focus on one.

We read this week that if someone accidentally kills another person, he is to run away to an IR MIKLAT, a "city of refuge." This is one of six cities that would eventually be set aside in Eretz Yisrael (there were actually more, though) that were actually the cities of the tribe of LEVI, who were not given any other specific portion of land. The accidental killer was to flee to one of these cities, where he was not to be touched by any member of the family of the person he had killed; he would be safe there. He had to remain there until the Kohen Gadol, who was in charge at the time, passes away, or until his own death, whichever came first.

The obvious question: Why such a long and harsh punishment? It was an ACCIDENT!

True, it may have been an accident, but these laws apply when it was the type of accident that COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED. It applies when the individual was just not being careful with whatever he was doing, where there may have been some negligence on his part. Sure, he obviously never meant to kill anybody, but if he had true concern for others, he would've been much more careful with his activities. So he now goes to live with members of Shevet LEVI, the people who work in the Bet Hamikdash, the people who can teach him care and consideration for others. On a side note, if the courts decide it was a "purely accidental" killing that could not have been avoided, the person DOES go free.

We are all very used to excusing our behaviors with, "but it was an ACCIDENT!" Those of us who work amongst children are particularly accustomed to this one. Maybe it really was so; but was there anything that could have been done to prevent the accident? Think about it, you may be surprised. We can almost always be more sensitive and more careful.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Cohen