



# Carnegie Shul Chatter

## August 24, 2017



Candle lighting: 7:45pm

Sabbath services: 9:20am

## Justice, Justice

A very interesting and timely parshah this week, the parshah, *Shoftim*, with the famous words, “justice, justice, shalt thou follow.”

Moses tells the Israelites that they must administer justice without corruption or favoritism, and that crimes must be meticulously investigated and evidence thoroughly examined. Judges must be above reproach and apply the law equally to all.

Today, of course, we live in times in which accusations are being made against our police and our judicial system, saying that justice is not blind, and that the law favors some groups and discriminates against others. I will not get into that debate, but wouldn't it be wonderful if justice was actually administered as the Torah intended?



## A Complicated World

It is a much more complicated world today than it was in Biblical times.

Today's parshah puts a lot of emphasis on eyewitness testimony, for example. A minimum of two witnesses are required by the Torah to secure a conviction in a case involving capital or corporal punishment. But criminologists today consider eyewitness testimony to often be highly unreliable.

Today, with the many scientific advances that have been made over the years, things like fingerprints, hair fiber samples, ballistics testing, and, of course, DNA matching often decide a criminal case.

Just yesterday, the governor of Missouri, delayed an execution four hours before it was scheduled to take place because of an inconclusive DNA test.

“A sentence of death is the ultimate, permanent punishment,” said the Governor.

Eyewitness testimony was the most reliable thing available in Torah times. I am glad we also have advanced science today.

Another very timely portion of the parshah deals with sanctuary cities. Today, we hear of sanctuary cities in America that shield undocumented aliens from prosecution by the Federal government. But this is not at all what the Torah intended when it described sanctuary cities.

In the Torah, sanctuary cities, or cities of refuge, were to be places where the inadvertent murderer may go to seek refuge. What is an inadvertent murderer? It is a man who accidentally kills someone and has no malice toward the person he kills. The Torah cites, as an example, a man who goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood with an axe, but the head of the axe flies off and kills the neighbor. The man who swung the axe could go to the sanctuary city to take refuge from anyone who might seek vengeance on behalf of the man who was accidentally killed. Not quite the same as the sanctuary cities of today.

The interesting article about Biblical Cities of Refuge below is excerpted from [myjewishlearning.com](http://myjewishlearning.com)

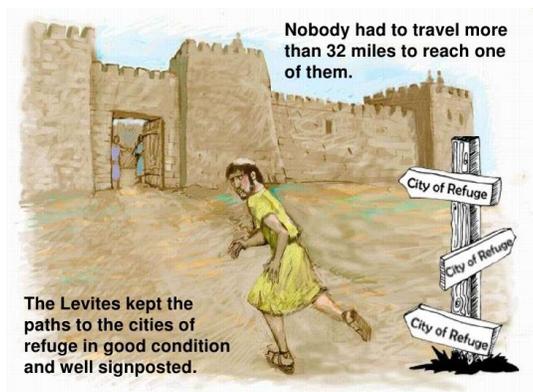
## Cities Or Sanctuaries

Cities of Refuge are symbols of God's unconditional love and constant presence among people.

*By Rabbi Neal J. Loevinger*

“Then the Lord said to Moses: Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, designate some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee. They will be places of refuge from the avenger, so that a person accused of murder may not die before he stands trial before the assembly’” (Numbers 35:9-12).

Rabbi Meier Levi, a chaplain and psychologist, writes movingly about the tremendous, paralyzing guilt that can torment someone who may have some responsibility in another’s death. The doctor who made a mistake, the careless driver, the person who didn’t take the warning signs of suicide or depression seriously enough, the family member who has to make a terrible decision to end life support — in such a situation, one can easily imagine feeling that one’s life is utterly destroyed, that one deserves to be rejected by both people and God. Rabbi Levi then draws a parallel between the designation of a city of refuge with the building of God’s Sanctuary in the center of the people: The most significant aspect of a City of Refuge was that it was, in every meaning of the word, a sanctuary. A sanctuary is, of course, a place of protection. But a sanctuary is also a temple to God — designed and built according to God’s instructions and cared for by priests.



[Earlier], we discussed God’s instructions to Moses to build a symbol of His presence among the Israelites: “*And build for Me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them*” (Exodus 25:8). We learned that the sanctuary was not meant as a house for God. God had *not* said, “*And build for Me a sanctuary so that I may dwell in it,*” but, “*And build Me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them.*” Here, at the very end of the Book of Numbers, we are again reminded what a sanctuary is.

A sanctuary — be it a temple of marble and gold or a City of Refuge to which criminals flee — is a powerful, concrete symbol of God’s constant presence among people. God dwells with people, whoever

they are, whatever they have done. His covenant with them is unshakable: His love is unconditional. No matter who you are and what you have done, God does not abandon you. God recognizes that people make mistakes. He always gives us another chance. And this is what the hapless offender — ridden with guilt and remorse—was to learn in the City of Refuge. (From *Ancient Secrets: Using the Stories of the Bible to Improve our Everyday Lives*, p. 198-199.)

One could even imagine that these accidental criminals would form a kind of community. They might have come to the city of refuge in a panic, feeling utterly lost, and found there others in the same situation, people who could truly understand their feelings. These were Levite cities; perhaps the fact that these cities had a special “religious” designation helped these “refugees” understand that they were not rejected by God for their actions.

Notice that the accidental criminal didn’t get off “scot-free;” he had to stay in the city of refuge until the current High Priest died, which could have been many years. Actions do have consequences, and reconciliation is not automatic; it proceeds on its own schedule, which can’t be predicted.

What makes the lesson of the cities of refuge so powerful is that accidental manslaughter is an extreme case—if someone who killed is not rejected by God, but can in fact still find empathy, safety, and the possibility of reconnection to the wider community, how much more does that apply to the everyday mistakes we all make! Nothing puts us beyond the reach of the Divine; there is no rift that can’t be at least partially healed, at least in theory.

How do we nurture such healing? By finding people who have “been there,” or at least who can listen without judgment; by letting go of old wounds (remember that the “blood-avenger” was no longer excused for his anger after a certain amount of time); by finding a place where we can be accepted with all of our imperfections, and by remembering that God understands that everybody makes mistakes, sometimes even terrible ones. The lesson of the *ir miklat* is that the process of healing takes time, space, community, and spirituality; with these elements, we can build Sanctuaries wherever we are.

## Joys and Sorrows in Our Ahavat Achim Family

Please share your news, whether joyful or sad, so that it can be included in the Chatter. Send notices to Mike Roteman at [mrmike7777@yahoo.com](mailto:mrmike7777@yahoo.com).

## Yahrzeit Plaques

Commemorate a loved one by dedicating a yahrzeit plaque in his or her memory at the Carnegie Shul. These beautiful plaques, mounted on the sanctuary walls, are lit on the loved one’s yahrzeit, Yom Kippur, and days when Yizkor is recited. The names are also read aloud from the Bimah during services on the Sabbath of the yahrzeit and on Yom Kippur. To purchase a plaque, for only \$175, please email Mike Roteman at [mrmike7777@yahoo.com](mailto:mrmike7777@yahoo.com).



## Shabbat Kiddush

Each Shabbat, after services, we join together to make Kiddush and Hamotzi and to share a delicious repast. Please consider sponsoring a Kiddush as an honorarium or a memorial, for only \$36. Your sponsorship will be announced from the bimah and in the weekly Chatter. To sponsor a Kiddush, please email to [mrmike7777@yahoo.com](mailto:mrmike7777@yahoo.com).



# The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg



**Wednesday, August 30**  
**7 pm**

Doors open 6:30

## The Hollywood Theater

1449 Potomac Avenue, Dormont  
Free on-street parking after 6 pm

**Free and open to the public**

Free popcorn and soda

**For tickets:**

Visit [www.southhillsjewishpittsburgh.org](http://www.southhillsjewishpittsburgh.org)

It's not just a baseball movie!

As Hitler invaded Europe, a young Jewish baseball player, Hammerin' Hank Greenberg, challenged Babe Ruth's homerun record and became an American hero.

The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg is a sometimes humorous and often nostalgic documentary about how this Detroit Tiger (and later Pittsburgh Pirate) became a beacon of hope to American Jews, who faced bigotry during the Depression and World War II, and how he became a genuine American hero.

***"You don't have to be Jewish to find it thoroughly engrossing and rewarding. You don't even have to know baseball"***  
— Jay Carr, Boston Globe



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