



The Accidental Killer

I once was at a playback theatre and the person whose story was acted out was a man who, driving back from Meron on Lag Ba'Omer, fell asleep at the wheel and accidentally killed his friend. I still remember how heavy that performance was and how we could all empathize with that man who carries that guilt and heartache with him forever.

I recently read an interesting article by Alice Gregor in the New Yorker titled, "The Sorrow and the Shame of the Accidental Killer. How do you live after unintentionally causing a death?" The article was forwarded to our group of Hatzala unit that provides psychological first aid to people at many types of situations - one such being car crashes where someone may be accidentally killed. The purpose of the unit's intervention is to help the person cope with the situation in order to help prevent PTSD. Although there are many unintentional injuries and deaths every year, most helping professionals (policemen, social workers, hospital personnel) don't receive any special training in how to respond to the people who were the ones who accidentally caused the fatalities.

Accidental killers often report experi-

encing symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder: flashbacks, hallucinations, nightmares, and what's known as "moral injury". They feel guilt and shame and want to atone or make amends in some way for the pain they have caused to others.

In the article, Gregor tells the story of Maryann Gray, a 21 year old happy college student who accidentally runs over a young boy who jumped in front of her moving car. This event changed her life forever. She never truly got over it. One thing that has helped her a bit is helping others who have been through a similar situation.

There are self-help books written for almost anything you can think of but there was no resource for anyone who had accidentally killed another person. So Gray set up a website called accidentalimpacts.org, Coping with Causing a Serious Accident. A Site for Information, Support, and Healing.

So why all this talk about accidents in a column about the portion of the week? Because this week's portion talks just about that, the mitzva to separate 6 cities of refuge, amongst the Levite cities, to which a murderer, who killed accidentally could flee (35:9-33). If a person kills someone the court has to decide if

- 1) The person is blameless and he is absolved of all responsibility
- 2) The act was unintentional, but with a degree of carelessness - then the perpetrator is exiled to a city of refuge

3) Unintentional but close to intentional - but the court can't carry out the death penalty

4) Intentional and the perpetrator had been warned and the act was witnessed - then he gets the death penalty

Maryann Gray, a secular Jew when learning about these cities wrote, "If I had been exiled to a city of refuge, I might not have needed exile from myself." She was moved by the idea that, in such cities, a person like her could participate fully in society without shame. "I love that there was a way of recognizing the true devastation that's been wrought, the harm that's been done, without condemning the individual", she said. "That's what I'm looking for - to live in the world with acceptance and with opportunity, but also with the acknowledgment that in running over this child something terrible happened and it deserves attention."

SINCE WE TALKED about accidents here is a recipe that was found by accident. The upside-down cake was concocted in the 1880s, by Stéphanie Tatin who was supposedly making an apple tart but overcooked the apples, so she tried to rescue it by putting the pastry base on top. And since there are still peaches to be found here is a recipe for an upside down peach cake.

UPSIDE DOWN PEACH CAKE

½ cup vegetable oil

1 cup brown sugar, packed

2 cups peach slices or 1 can peach slices

1 Tbsp amaretto

1⅓ cups flour

¾ cup sugar

2 tsp baking powder

½ tsp salt

2 Tbsp oil

½ cup apple juice

1 tsp vanilla

1 egg

Mix oil and sugar at bottom of baking pan. Arrange peach slices, slightly overlapping above. Sprinkle with amaretto. Mix together batter ingredients. Pour over the peaches. Bake at 180°C for 35 minutes or until cake tests done. Cool then invert to serve. Serve with ice cream. 