

## You shall not stand aside while your brother's blood is shed. (19:16)

*Rashi* explains that one may not stand idly by witnessing his friend drowning in the river and not save him. Likewise, if a wild animal or a robber is chasing his friend, he must take action to save him. In the secular world, one who reaches out to his fellow is considered a kind person. One who acts maliciously to hurt his fellow is considered a cruel person. The one who does nothing, acts normally, does not want to get involved, is neither good nor bad. No laws enjoin us to be kind.

The Torah has a different view. Torah life leaves no room for neutrality or apathy. It is not enough simply not to be cruel; one must be kind. Not taking positive action is tantamount to taking negative action. Standing by while one's fellow suffers is an act of cruelty. While at certain times we are unable to lend a hand, when the individual in need is beyond our ability to help – we should at least develop a sense of empathy. It should hurt. A Jew feels pain even if he is unable to solve the problem, to help the person.

*Yaldei* Tehran, the children of Tehran, had immigrated to the Holy Land through Tehran. They had become victims of the secular government that was poisoning their minds and severing their relationship with Judaism. Upon hearing of the tragedy befalling these children, the **Brisker Rav, zl**, wept bitterly as he lamented their fate. He was questioned concerning his reaction: "After all, what good is weeping? It does not alter the course of events." The *Rav* responded, "*Az es tut vei – veint men*. When it hurts, one weeps."

The *Rav* continued with an insight concerning the punishment which *Iyov* sustained. *Chazal* teach that Pharaoh's debate concerning Egypt's "Jewish problem" included his three wise counselors: Bilaam, the wicked pagan prophet; *Yisro*, the Priest of Midyan, who later converted and became father-in-law of both Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Elazar *HaKohen*, son of Aharon *HaKohen*; and *Iyov*, the pious man who became the all-time symbol of suffering. When Pharaoh asked his council for suggestions regarding ridding Egypt of its Jews, Bilaam, acting according to his reputation, advised killing them. He had no problem with an Egyptian holocaust, so intense was his hatred of the Jews. *Yisro's* reaction was classic: he fled Egypt. Knowing full well that he was up against rabid anti-Semites, he had no recourse but to run – or to join the Jews in their fate. *Iyov* surprisingly remained silent; his response was silence.

*Chazal* teach that each one received his Heavenly due. Bilaam wanted to see the death of the Jews; he was killed. *Yisro* ran away; Hashem rewarded him with two outstanding sons-in-law and the eternal respect of the Jewish People. *Iyov* was destined to experience a life of pain, misery, affliction and deprivation that has become the sad benchmark of troubles visited upon a person. Why? How does his punishment correspond with his reaction? What did he do? The *Brisker Rav* explained that his silence "earned" him his pain. When it hurts, one weeps. True, he could not help the Jews, but this was no excuse for silence. Neutrality does not become our People. Apathy

defines the rest of society – not the Jewish population. We are a nation of doers; people who do not remain silent when our fellow is suffering. Our inability to actualize salvation does not preclude our empathy and sensitivity. We care because we are Jewish. Caring defines the Jew. I will leave the rest unsaid.

**Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita**, asserts that the prohibition against standing idly by as one's brother is experiencing a life-threatening travail extends to what I feel is an unfortunately too common occurrence: indifference as one's fellow is being humiliated. When one's friend is accused of a misdeed, the issue is not concerning the veracity of the accusation; it might even be true. He is shamed publicly, while we stand by and do absolutely nothing. True, one is afraid that by involving himself, he might be the next one to be sacrificed on the altar of public embarrassment, but is this a reason to allow the blood of one's fellow to be shed publicly? People get carried away and often their claim is justified, but, regardless of the justification, one may not shame a fellow Jew in public. It is tantamount to murder. One who witnesses a public murder and refuses to get involved is no less a murderer than the actual offender.

Furthermore, suggests *Rav Gamliel*, the prohibition, *Lo saamod*, applies not only to an instance in which one's life hangs in the balance. Whenever we witness our fellow suffering, going through a period of travail, being the subject of public scorn, undergoing a personal *tzarah*, trouble, we must not stand by and do nothing. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to take a moment the next time we go to *shul* to look around, peruse the congregation, take a penetrating look at the attendees. How many are suffering? How many need a *yeshuah*, salvation? How many could we personally help? For how many should we empathize? *Lo saamod al dam reiecha*.