

They shall speak up and say, “Our hands have not spilled this blood, and our eyes did not see.” (21:7)

The elders of the city closest to the unknown victim of a homicide declared, “Our hands have not spilled this (innocent) blood, and our eyes did not see.” *Rashi* explains that this does not mean that the elders are in any way suspected of homicidal intent. They lament that they had not seen the victim; thus, they had not sent him off properly with food and accompaniment, as is the appropriate procedure for sending off a welcome guest. It seems from *Rashi’s* explanation that had we accompanied the victim, he might not have become a victim. People pick on loners, those who have no friends, those who stand out in a crowd, because they appear to be different, unattached, without friends, isolated from society.

Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, suggests a novel interpretation of *Rashi*. Rather than learn that *Rashi* is referring to the victim, he suggests that *Rashi* is speaking about the man who turned to violence and murder. What type of person takes a human life? Can someone who murders a fellow Jew be considered a member of humanity, or do we ascribe to him the appellation of fiend, beast – certainly nothing that would grant him equality with us? *Rav* Neiman feels that *Rashi* addresses these questions, pointing out that murder is an act of desperation with life. It is an indication that this person has no self-esteem, is so down on himself that he is envious of everyone and wants to lash out at anybody who gets into his way.

Perhaps all of this could have been prevented had *Bais Din* made the effort to reach out, to befriend the murderer. This down and out fellow came to town looking for something – a change, some recognition, a little respect. As had happened so often in this wretched man’s life: no one cared about him; no one wanted to know him. His frustration grew and became so overwhelming, so overpowering, that he lashed out against the first people whose path he crossed. Most ignored him; one did not – his victim.

All the murderer sought was a little bit of love, a little bit of kindness. He was probably not the type of person whose charisma attracted people to him. Thus, for him, friends were at a premium. People gravitated away from him, with each instance slowly bringing his pent-up emotions to the boiling point. The murderer was a hapless person, whom no one really liked, and concerning whom no one really cared. Well, now, he thought, through his perverted perspective, people will once and for all take notice: he will catalyze conversation; he will no longer be ignored. This is quite often the line of thought evinced by those who have been rejected by society.

What about his parents? What role did they play in the equation? Perhaps it all started with his parents. They might have had some issues--economic, social--and the place to drop and take out all of one’s problems (after taking it out on one another) is on the children. The children, more often than not, suffer the brunt of parents’ idiosyncrasies and failures. The end result is a messed up, troubled young man, who badly needed attention – and did not get it, so he took it all out on the

poor victim.

Had the elders taken notice and invited the murderer to dinner, his problems might have been diffused, and a murder might have been averted. Now, they assert that it was not their hands that shed this innocent blood. They tried. It was simply too little – too late.