

"And they shall declare and say: our hands have not shed this blood and our eyes have not seen him." (21:7)

The *Mishna* in *Sotah* (45b) explains that the elders absolve themselves from the blame in the death of this unfortunate man. Their evidence is that no man came into their presence who was allowed to depart without food or leave without an escort. *Rashi* extends this concept with the interpretation that "*we did not send him away without food thereby forcing him to steal, through which he was killed.*" Failure to exercise communal responsibility towards the unfortunate is an indictment of Jewish leadership. If a Jew becomes a criminal, the Jewish leadership in particular and the community as a whole have been remiss in fulfilling their duty. No person should ever be left in such straits that he must resort to a life of crime to support his needs.

This *Rashi* is both astonishing and insightful. We should be cognizant to the needs of each individual, for our communal failure to fulfill our duty to him renders us responsible for his death. One cannot ascertain what will drive an individual over the edge to a life of crime. Our obligation is to provide our fellow Jews with the opportunity for material and spiritual sustenance, thereby preventing their emotional and spiritual collapse. The insistence that "*our hands did not spill this blood*" should be applicable to spiritual as well as physical matters. How often do we spiritually alienate someone by being insensitive to their background and needs? As we are enjoined to provide material support, it is similar to our obligation to provide spiritual sustenance for those in need. If they resort to a life totally alien to *Torah* dictates, our neglect has perpetrated the spilling of their blood.